# DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 304 332 SE 050 398

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TITLE Environmental Activism Revisited: The Changing Nature of Communication through Organizational Public Relations, Special Interest Groups and the Mass Media. Monographs in Environmental Education and Environmental Studies, Volume V.

INSTITUTION North American Association for Environmental Education, Troy, OH.

PUB DATE Jan 89

NOTE 128p.; For other publications in this series see ED 274 535.

AVAILABLE FROM North American Association for Environmental Education, P.O. Box 400, Troy, OH 45373 ($8.00).

PUB TYPE Collected Works - General (020) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.

DESCRIPTORS *Activism; *College Science; Conflict Resolution; *Environmental Education; *Hazardous Materials; Higher Education; *Mass Media Effects; Mass Media Role; Natural Resources; Nuclear Power Plants; Radiation Effects; *Undergraduate Students; Waste Disposal; *Wastes

ABSTRACT

The environmental movement of the 1960's and early 1970's resulted in unprecedented attention to environmental issues both in the mass media and in the scholarly literature. Interest has waned in recent years, with a concomitant erosion of coverage of what many consider enduring problems--particularly in water and air pollution and nuclear power. This monograph brings together both an historical perspective and a current picture of one critical element in the environmental-movement dynamic: the clash between environmental activists and their target organizations. Each chapter focuses on a different actor in that conflict--pressure groups, the media that cover them, governmental agencies with the power to regulate their opponents or the public relations practitioners employed by the organizations they oppose. All the chapters emphasize the role that communication plays in disputes between organizations and activists. Included are: (1) "Community Pluralism and Newspaper Coverage of a High-Level Nuclear Waste Siting Issue" (Sharon Dunwoody and Marshel Rossow); (2) "Media and Protest" (C. N. Olien, P. J. Tichenor, and G. A. Donohue); (3) "Today's College Youth--A Generation at Rest" (Mark A. Larson); (4) "A Situational Theory of Environmental Issues, Publics, and Activists" (James E. Grunig); and (5) "Activism in the Northwest: Surveying the Effects of Public Relations on Conflict Resolution" (Larissa A. Grunig). (CW)

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# MONOGRAPHS

## In Environmental Education and Environmental Studies

## Volume V

### Environmental Activism Revisited: The Changing Nature of Communication Through Organizational Public Relations, Special Interest Groups and the Mass Media

SE 050 398

MONOGRAPHS

in

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

and

ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

# ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM REVISITED: THE CHANGING NATURE OF COMMUNICATION THROUGH ORGANIZATIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS, SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS AND THE MASS MEDIA

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Published by
THE NORTH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION
P. O. Box 400
Troy, Ohio  45373

January, 1989

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# ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM REVISITED: THE CHANGING NATURE OF COMMUNICATION THROUGH ORGANIZATIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS, SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS AND THE MASS MEDIA

## Overview

The environmental movement of the 1960s and early 1970s resulted in unprecedented attention to environmental issues both in the mass media and in the scholarly literature. Interest has waned in recent years, with a concomitant erosion of coverage of what many consider enduring problems--particularly in water and air pollution and nuclear power.

This monograph brings together both an historical perspective and a current picture of one critical element in the environmental-movement dynamic: the clash between environmental activists and their target organizations. Each chapter focuses on a different actor in that conflict--pressure groups, the media that cover them, governmental agencies with the power to regulate their opponents or the public relations practitioners employed by the organizations they oppose. All authors, however, emphasize the role that communication plays in disputes between organizations and activists.

As a result, readers should come away with a glimpse into the future of environmental activism--with implications for managing communication among the key players identified as activists, organizations, the government and mass media.

In "Media and Protest," three scholars from the University of Minnesota dispute the conventional notion of media as "Fourth Estate," or watchdogs of society. Olien, Tichenor and Donohue explain that although media traditionally have been seen as vital resources for social protest, the press actually serves more as an integral part of the process of accommodation of social protest.

By analyzing media content, interviewing media leaders and surveying media audiences during such intense confrontations as occurred in the planning and building of a high-voltage powerline in the late 1970s, Olien and her colleagues find that movements do not center on media, nor do the media create social movements. Instead, radio, television and newspapers serve to accelerate (or decelerate)--rather than initiate--movements.

Dunwoody and Rossow, both at the University of Wisconsin, also look at media coverage of conflict. Their structural analysis of newspapers in 33 communities begins with the question of what news journalists choose to report. The answers come from analyzing coverage of a 1986 Department of Energy proposal to locate nuclear waste repositories in Wisconsin. They find that the more pluralistic the community, the less likely its local media are to report conflict.

In "Community Pluralism and Media Coverage of a High-Level Nuclear Waste Siting Issue," Dunwoody and Rossow also argue that the more pluralistic the community, the more enterprise reporting that takes place. In other words, reporters there "hustle" for stories rather than simply reacting to events or covering what happens. Finally, the attitudes of individual editors and reporters account for the most enterprise reporting.

"Applications of Cognitive Psychology to Environmental Communication" is an attempt to get inside the minds of individual journalists. Stocking, an assistant professor of journalism at Indiana University, contrasts Skinner's radical behaviorism with the more contemporary cognitive revolution in psychology. She argues the "confirmation bias," or reporters' tendency to posit hypotheses about stories they cover using strategies that confirm rather than disconfirm them. When this happens, she explains, readers may be led to erroneous conclusions about important environmental issues. She uses coverage of the Chernobyl accident as an example of this type of error in journalistic judgment.

"Today's College Youth--A Generation at Rest?" shifts the focus from individual reporters to individual activists. Larson, a journalism professor from Humboldt State University in California, explores the social origins of activist behavior.

Larson finds, through a survey of local college students, that today's collegians are very politically active--and that their environmental activism developed relatively early in the life cycle. His results suggest important lessons for environmental educators interested in producing a citizenry that is knowledgeable concerning the environment, aware and skilled in how to become involved in helping solve its problems and motivated to work toward their solution.

Publics of that nature are the major concern in the work of J. Grunig, professor of journalism at the University of Maryland. His "Situational Theory of Environmental Issues, Publics and Activists" argues that publics arising around environmental issues present opportunities for activist groups and threats for their target organizations.

This chapter reviews the results of a program of research to develop a theory of such publics--segmenting the "general public" into categories useful for planning communication programs. J. Grunig consistently finds four kinds of publics: all-issue, active on all issues studied; apathetic, or publics that communicate little about any issue; single-issue, active only on one issue; and involving-issue-only, or active on a "hot issue" that involves nearly everyone and that receives extensive media coverage.

Finally, "Activism in the Northwest" surveys the effects of public relations on conflict resolution. Implications of this study by L. Grunig, also on the journalism faculty of the University of Maryland, should help public relations practitioners deal more effectively with the myriad special interest groups challenging them directly and indirectly, through both the mass media and government. By gauging the extent of environmental activism and its consequences in the Northwest, her research also serves as a benchmark in helping chart the course of activism and organizational responses.

Each of these chapters initially was presented as a paper during a panel on environmental activism hosted by the North American Association for Environmental Education in 1987. Our goal was to apply at least two decades of research on environmental activism to the evolving picture of environmentalism in the late 1980s. Together these studies suggest what we all consider to be important lessons for the environmental communicator of the future--whether that person be reporter, activist, policy-maker or public relations practitioner.

Larissa A. Grunig
Editor

# COMMUNITY PLURALISM AND NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF A HIGH-LEVEL NUCLEAR WASTE SITING ISSUE[1]

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Scholars have long been interested in predictors of news coverage and have pinned their hopes on everything from the idiosyncracies of individual reporters and editors to such "meta-variables" as the prevailing political ideology.

In recent years, the trend has been to abandon micro predictors in favor of macro predictors. That is, researchers have made the argument that individual-level variables do not do as good a job of predicting newsmaking as do organizational-level variables (Hirsch, 1977; Dunwoody, 1979; Becker, 1982; Whitney, 1982).

But for years a team of researchers at the University of Minnesota has asserted that, while the trend is in the right direction, the predictors are not yet macro enough. In a series of studies (Tichenor, Donohue and Olien, 1980), the team has demonstrated that it is the structure within which mass media are embedded that accounts for patterns of organizational behavior. In other words, media coverage of issues is dependent on the structural characteristics of the communities in which those media operate.

In this study we allow those structural characteristics to compete with other predictors of coverage--both organizational and individual--to influence newspaper coverage of a single issue. The issue is the selection of two regions of Wisconsin in 1986 by the U.S. Department of Energy as possible secondary sites for a high-level nuclear waste repository. Our focus is on understanding the patterns of coverage of the issue by newspapers serving communities in the immediate vicinity of the two sites.

## Predictors of Newsmaking

Over the years, Tichenor, Donohue and Olien have worked to develop a social systems framework within which to understand the behavior of the mass media. Their basic argument is that media organizations are very much the products of the communities in which they are embedded and that the level of pluralism of a community will be associated with specific news reporting patterns.

They define the mass media as a part of the information distribution system in a community that serves to maintain community norms and prevailing structures and processes. These communities can range from monolithic to pluralistic in terms of their power structures, and the news media necessarily abide by that variance. For example, in a monolithic community, a newspaper may be largely engaged in consensus building, while in a more pluralistic community--where diverse power bases may compete for control--a newspaper may be much more likely to report conflicting ideas.

The Minnesota team's numerous studies support these contentions, for the most part. For example, they have found that newspapers in smaller, less pluralistic communities are less likely to cover conflictive situations than are newspapers in larger, more pluralistic communities (Tichenor, Donohue and Olien, 1980). The researchers argue that "homogeneous communities, viewing the newspaper as an extension of personal communication and having fewer mechanisms for protecting the social order against disruption, may well look to the press as an instrument for prevention and suppression of tension (pg. 87)."

Still, other researchers have argued that predictors of newsmaking are best located at an organizational level. Dunwoody (1979), for example, found that organizational demands were the best predictors of the behaviors of science journalists at a large scientific meeting. And Becker (1982), in a secondary analysis of data from a national sample of journalists, found that reporters for the print media differ in both attitudes and behavior from those working for broadcast media. Broadcast reporters, for example, were less critical of the media than were their print counterparts. They were less likely to be specialty reporters, a factor that could have great influence on reporting patterns. Both Hirsch (1977) and Whitney (1982) argue that findings of studies designed to tap into individual predictors of news selection are better understood when viewed from an organizational perspective.

Other researchers have not abandoned individual predictors. Particularly with respect to the production of entertainment information (Newcomb and Alley, 1982), researchers argue that the efforts of individuals can have powerful effects on the information that we read or see. In one recent study, Olien, Tichenor and Donohue (1986) found that individual editors' attitudes about the function of a newspaper did influence reporting of conflict in newspapers, even after the effects of community pluralism had been accounted for. Although the authors urged caution in interpreting these findings as evidence for idiosyncratic, individual-level effects, the patterns do suggest that understanding media coverage patterns may require a more complex set of factors than that attained with macro-level variables alone.

In this study, we concentrate on the relationship between community pluralism and patterns of newspaper coverage. But we additionally present information about both individual- and organizational-level factors to permit them to explain some of the variance in coverage patterns, should that be appropriate.

## Siting a Nuclear Waste Repository

In January 1986, the Department of Energy announced that 20 locations in seven midwestern and eastern states had been selected for an original list of 235 as possible sites for a secondary high-level nuclear waste repository. Those locations included two in Wisconsin, the Puritan Batholith in the northwest portion of the state and the Wolf River Batholith in the northeastern portion. Over the course of the next five months, the DOE held a number of hearings in the state, many of them packed with state officials and citizens, including native Indians, whose land was central to one of the sites.

Citizen opposition to siting a repository in Wisconsin was obvious to pollsters long before to DOE decision in 1986. And the state's Radioactive Waste Review Board, created in 1981 to maintain state involvement in the issue, took an increasingly negative stand on the siting issue as time went on and its relationship with DOE seesawed from nonexistent to, at best, tepid (Kraft, Cleary and Schaefer, 1987).

According to Kraft, et al. (1987), more than 200 individuals testified at the four hearings, 14% of them from state agencies or local governments, 14%

from public interest groups and the rest (72%) as private individuals. Testimony was overwhelmingly critical of the DOE plan; ninety-eight percent of those who testified were opposed to locating the repository in the state.

In late May 1986, DOE suddenly announced that it was abandoning site selection east of the Mississippi River and would concentrate instead on selecting a primary site in the West. For our purposes, however, the point is that, for nearly six months, communities sitting on top of two geologic areas in Wisconsin lived with the prospect that a high-level nuclear waste repository could be built underneath them. During that time, the federal government provided a host of newsworthy opportunities, including public hearings. Governmental officials and individual citizens both denounced the DOE plans. It was an irresistible opportunity to look at how newspapers in the two affected regions of the state handled the story.

## Hypotheses

We devised three hypotheses for this study, two of them directly related to community pluralism and one only tangentially so.

Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1980), as noted above, assert that higher levels of community pluralism should be associated with a willingness on the part of newspapers to present a more conflictive, more diverse spectrum of information. Newspapers in less pluralistic communities should attempt to minimize social conflict by keeping their coverage of conflictive situations to a minimum. So in this study, we hypothesized;

H1: Newspapers in more pluralistic communities will be more likely to report conflict in their coverage of the siting issue than will newspapers in less pluralistic communities.

Similarly, another strategy one would expect from newspapers from more homogeneous communities, if one buys the argument that they are intent on maintaining a harmonious social fabric, would be an avoidance of divisive issues altogether. An issue as large as a high-level waste repository literally could not be ignored. But one instead might find newspapers from more homogeneous communities adopting coverage patterns that would minimize the attention paid. Here, we operationalize "minimizing behavior" as covering only those events that loom as legitimate objects for attention but doing no "enterprise reporting", that is, gathering information and framing issues for readers in ways that go beyond simple coverage of events. Specifically, we hypothesized:

H2: Newspapers in more pluralistic communities will be more likely to engage in enterprise reporting--that is, nonevent reporting--than will newspapers in less pluralistic communities.

Our third hypothesis stems from another concern: the question of the usefulness of information about the siting issue that is made available to readers. A high-level nuclear waste siting process should be of intense interest to citizens of the area, and we wished to evaluate, in some form, the quality of information passed on to them in newspapers.

To do this, we focuses on a concept introduced by Lemert et al. (1977) called "mobilizing information." Mobilizing information, says Lemert, is "any information which allows action by persons willing to do so" (Lemert and Larkin, 1979, pg. 504). Bybee (1982) defines the concept similarly as "information provided in a story which helps readers turn their attitudinal reactions into behavior (pg. 399)."

The point in both cases is that mobilizing information provides the kind of detail about persons, places or things that allows readers to follow up, to continue to seek information about the issue or to act on information already available. For example, if a story attributes information about processing nuclear fuel to an expert, does the story identify the expert in enough detail to enable a reader to contact that person? Or if a story cites a research article, does the cite contain enough information to enable a reader to find the article in the library?

Lemert and colleagues have found that journalists are more likely to exclude mobilizing information from their stories than they are to include it. And they are particularly likely to exclude such information when dealing with negative or controversial topics (Lemert et al, 1977). Given our expectations about the relationship between community pluralism and reporting of conflict in this study, we hypothesized:

H3: Newspapers in less pluralistic settings will provide more detailed mobilizing information than will newspapers in more pluralistic settings.

In other words, we are suggesting that those newspapers most willing to give their readers diverse and conflictive views will be least willing to provide them with the kinds of details they need to act on the information they receive, while newspapers least willing to aggressivley cover the nuclear waste siting will be most likely to provide such mobilizing details.

## Methods

To examine the relationship between community pluralism and newspaper coverage of the siting issue, we selected 33 communities within or peripheral to the two areas being considered as repository sites. Twenty-five of the communities were within or near the primary site in the northeastern part of the state; eight were situated near the secondary site in the northwestern part of the state. The 33 communities constituted a census of communities served by daily or weekly newspapers near the two sites. The issue would be a local one for newspapers serving these communities.

Community pluralism. We operationally defined pluralism in a way that was largely consistent with the definition used by Tichenor, Donohue and Olien in the bulk of their work (1980, page 40)[2]. The major difference between our two definitions was that, while Tichenor and colleagues allowed population level to account for some 80% of the variance in their pluralism measure, we tried to hold the influence of size to 20% of the variance.

Specifically, we gathered the following data for each of the 33 communities:

-Population;

-Proportion of businesses in the community relative to population size;

-Number of religious denominations; and

-Proportions of minority and private school students relative to all students in the community.3

Each community was ranked separately on each of the five variables, and the resulting values were summed to give the community a total pluralism score. The use of proportions for most of the items amounted to a control for population size.

Once ranked, the communities were divided into groups labelled high, medium and low pluralism. We then selected four communities (and their newspapers) from each group. To maximize variance in the pluralism variable, we plucked communities from the extremes of the pluralism list and from the middle of those in the medium pluralism group.

Of the newspapers in these selected communities, five were dailies and seven were weeklies. Four dailies and three weeklies were from the northeast (primary site), while one daily and four weeklies were from the northwest (secondary site). Circulations ranged from a low of 1,500 to a high of 58,000.

Once the sample was selected, we engaged in two data-gathering techniques: content analysis and interviews with journalists.

Content analysis. Two coders examined all editions of each newspaper in the sample between 16 January and 30 May 1986 for news copy dealing with the nuclear waste issue. The time period began with the DOE announcement that the Wisconsin locations were being considered as nuclear waste repositories and ended with the announcement by DOE that the sites were no longer part of the repository plan. Copy analyzed included news stories, personal columns and editorials. Letters to the editor were not included.

Each story was examined to determine (1) story orientation, (2) presence of conflict, and (3) extent of mobilizing information.

Story orientation was a determination of whether a story was event-based or issue-based. An event-based story was one driven by an outside happening--the presence of a hearing, an action by a governmental official, etc. An issue-based story was defined as a story that was newspaper-determined, i.e., based on a newspaper's own initative rather than on an outside happening to which the newspaper was reacting.

A story was coded as containing conflict if it included specific statements or actions by opposing sides and made clear who the protagonists were. Thus, it was not sufficient that a story simply reported on a subject of controversy (given the topic at hand, all stories would have qualified under this definition); it was necessary that the opposing sides be clearly identified and that their positions or actions be stated in the story. A story was coded as either containing or not containting conflict.

We defined mobilizing information as story content upon which a reader might be able to take further action. Such information was coded by first searching out what we termed "mobilizing opportunities" in the stories and then categorizing the comprehensiveness of the mobilizing information offered for each of those opportunities.

Mobilizing opportunities were references to governmental officials, agencies and departments; industries, industrial organizations and industrial spokespersons; environmental advocacy groups and individuals; individuals used specifically for their expertise in issues at hand; and individuals who were residents of affected communities.

Once a mobilizing opportunity had been identified in a story, it was coded as displaying complete, partial or nonexistent mobilizing information.

Complete mobilizing information was material that the reader could use to complete an action based on that information alone. An example would be the title, name and address or phone number of a governmental official mentioned in a story, or the specific date, time and place of a meeting. In each case, the reader could contact the individual or attend the meeting without first having to gather more details to make action possible.

Partial mobilizing information was material that gave the reader enough information to pursue further action but not enough to complete the action without gathering more information. An example would be the mention of the date of a hearing and the community in which it would take place but no exact listing of time and address. Another example would be the mention of a federal agency such as the Department of Energy without listing an exact address or phone number.

Nonexistent mobilizing information would be a case of a mobilizing opportunity that contained no clues to help the reader take further action. For example, a story might refer to an area resident without giving a name or home town, or might mention an upcoming hearing without providing a date or location.

Two coders content analyzed the stories. Reliability was assessed by having the two individuals code a random sample of the stories. Scott's pi (Scott, 1955) was initially used to take chance into account, and the resulting reliability scores ranged from a high of 1.0 to a low of .332 for individual items. We increased reliability in a number of instances by (1) identifying coding disparities and repairing them and (2) collapsing sets of variables into composite variables. In a couple of cases we decided to live with the low reliability scores because they were caused by factoring only two coders into the Scott's pi formula. For example, observed agreement for one variable occurred in 19 out of 20 stories. But utilizing only two coders meant that the Scott's pi calculation brought the reliability down from .95 to .47.

Interviews with editors and reporters. After completing the content analysis, one team member interviewed editors and/or reporters at each newspaper who had been involved in covering the issue. At some of the smaller newspapers, the editor and reporter turned out to be the same person.

Respondents were interviewed in person at several newspapers and by telephone at others. In all, we talked with six editors, four reporters and six editor/reporters. The total of 16 interviews represented at least one contact at each newspaper.

Questions were designed to tap into both individual- and organization-level factors that we thought might influence coverage of the siting issue. Individual-level questions, for example, included queries about how important and interesting the respondents personally found the siting issue to be, how important and interesting they thought their readers found the issue, and whether anything in their educational background had prepared them to handle such an issue. At the organizational-level, the questions covered such basics as size of news staff and news hole, as well as such things as the newspaper's objectives in handling the issue as it did.

Each respondent was asked the same questions, and answers were recorded on a response form. In the case of face-to-face interviews, responses were also taped. We then grouped responses by pluralism level and according to question content for use in the analysis.

## Findings

During the five-month duration of the issue in Wisconsin, the 12 newspapers studied varied greatly in the number of stories they carried, ranging from a low of three to a high of 94 stories and editorials. Ultimately, we content analyzed 374 stories from the newspapers.

Of that total, 56% were locally written; the rest were generated by wire services or some other nonlocal source. Ninety-three percent of the stories coded were news stories. The rest were editorials (16, or 4%), opinion pieces (9 or 2%) and editorial cartoons (3 or 1%). Nearly half of the stories (48%) were on the front pages of newspapers.

Our ultimate n of 12 newspapers makes it difficult to statistically test our hypotheses. The number is too small for appropriate statistical tests, and the purposive nature of newspaper selection in this study thwarts assumptions about normal distributions necessary for parametric tests. But we do report here whether or not the patterns discerned are consistent with our hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1. Coverage patterns do support our hypothesis that newspapers in more pluralistic settings were more likely to report conflict than were newspapers in less pluralistic settings. Newspapers in the most homogeneous communities framed no stories conflictually, those falling into the medium pluralism category offered conflict in an average of 10.6% of their stories, and those in the most pluralistic setting reported conflict in an average 22.5% of their stories.

We should note here that, in the face of an obviously conflictive issue, newspapers in this study carried relatively little conflict as we operationally defined it (the presence of competing interests in the same story). Among the 12 newspapers, half offered no stories that fit with our definition. Among the others, the proportion of conflictive stories ranged from 29.7% to less than 1%.

Hypothesis 2: The patterns of enterprise reporting also generally fit our second hypothesis. Newspapers in the high-pluralism category showed evidence of the most enterprise reporting (an average of 8.4% of stories), medium-pluralism newspapers fell in the middle (7.8% on average), and newspapers in the low-pluralism category carried no apparent enterprise stories at all.

These numbers reflect a great deal of variance in enterprise reporting, ranging from zero (five newspapers) to a high of 17.3% of coverage in one daily newspaper in the high-pluralism group. We shall attempt to explain this variance later.

Hypothesis 3. Finally, we find patterns in the data that support the mobilizing information hypothesis as well. Newspapers in more homogeneous settings offered a greater percentage of complete mobilizing information than did newspapers in the most heterogeneous settings (see Table 1).

The situation was reversed for partial mobilizing information, with newspapers in the high pluralism category offering a much greater percentage (51.2%) than newspapers in either the medium (42%) or low (37.7%) pluralism categories. The proportion of mobilizing opportunities for which no mobilizing information was offered remained fairly constant across pluralism categories.

Do the community-level variables explain all the variance in coverage patterns of this issue? In at least one respect, the answer seems to be no.

Earlier we noted the variance in enterprise reporting. Within the high-pluralism category alone, the variation in proportion of enterprise reporting ranged from 17% to 2%. Some newspapers were doing a fair amount of story generation on their own, while others were doing nothing but reacting to events in their environment.

What accounts for this difference? Since the variation is occuring within levels of pluralism, our macro-variable can't explain it. Organizational-level variables did not help, either. For example, within the high-pluralism category both the newspaper at the top of the enterprise reporting heap (17%) and the one at the bottom (2%) were owned by the same chain. Editors at both newspapers said they had sufficient space and resources to do the job. In fact, the newspaper that scored low on enterprise reporting had twice as many reporters on its staff as the one that scored high.

Our data suggest that the answer may lie at the individual level. The editor at the newspaper with the high level of enterprise reporting said the nuclear waste repository issue was very important both to himself and to his readers. And a reporter at that newspaper indicated that she had taken on the responsibility of following the issue and making sure that the newspaper kept on top of it.

Contrast those opinions with the responses of the editor at the similarly sized newspaper with the low level of enterprise reporting. That editor rated the issue as only moderately interesting and important, and he assigned reporters to cover aspects of the issue as they arose; ultimately, he said, at least nine reporters had been given pieces of the story to cover.

## Discussion

In this study of newspaper coverage of a nuclear waste siting issue, we found that coverage did vary by the level of structural pluralism of the community in which a newspaper was embedded. Newspapers serving more pluralistic communities covered the issue more extensively than did newspapers in more homogeneous settings; they were more likely to offer conflict in their news pages and were more likely to go beyond simple reactions to events by engaging in enterprise reporting.

Such findings are consistent with Tichenor, Donohue and Olien's contentions over the years that media organizations are very much the products of their environments. Newspapers in Wisconsin communities that had more heterogeneous power bases seemed more willing to present the nuclear waste repository issue as a battle among various power structures. They were more willing to devote resources to playing out the complex issue for readers in ways that went beyond next-day coverage of meetings or hearings.

Newspapers in more homogeneous communities, on the other hand, behaved in ways consistent with the argument that they were trying to minimize social conflict. They played down overt conflict in their stories. They reacted to events in their domain but never ventured beyond that traditional journalistic mandate. Amazingly enough, some of these newspapers even seemed to ignore the issue wholesale. Remember, the proposed nuclear waste repository site sat right beneath these communities, so any one newspaper would have a difficult time arguing that it had no responsibility for coverage of the issue. Yet two of the weekly newspapers in our sample carried only three stories each in the course of a five-month period! Although both were small-circulation publications, the editors claimed to have all the resources they needed to handle the story.

We were particularly struck by the robustness of community pluralism as a predictor of newspaper coverage patterns in this study. Past studies of community pluralism had allowed size to account for most of the variance in the concept. We chose to limit the contribution of size (and thus--at least with respect to newspapers in these communities--resources) in our measure of community pluralism. Our strategy moved at least one small community, served by a weekly newspaper, into the high-pluralism category. Yet that newspaper's performance was consistent in every respect with the performance of the other three newspapers in the high-pluralism category. In this instance, at least, simple amount of resources did not account for the coverage patterns we found. That strengthens our belief that the patterns were indeed related to the heterogeneity of community structures in which these newspapers were embedded.

Within the high-pluralism category, however, we did find variance in newspaper performance that may be attributable to individual-level variables. Newspapers that engaged in the most enterprise reporting seemed to be those with editors who felt that the nuclear waste repository issue was important to both themselves and to their readers, and they were often joined by reporters who took individual responsibility for making sure the issue was attended to on a regular basis.

These kinds of data suggest that within larger coverage patterns framed by community-level attributes, other types of variables may be at work to account for important components of variance. With respect to amount of enterprise reporting, for example, the amount of variance within the high-pluralism category nearly equalled that between the high- and low-pluralism categories. If community-level phenomena cannot account for such within-category variance, then researchers must be prepared to search elsewhere for it. This study suggests that variables at other levels of analysis may have much theoretical explanatory power.

Finally, this study found that, while newspapers in pluralistic settings were offering readers more vigorous accounts of the nuclear waste siting controversy, it was the newspapers in homogeneous settings that provided readers with the type of information that would enable them to act on what they read. Newspapers in less pluralistic settings were more likely to provide complete mobilizing information than were newspapers in more pluralistic settings.

Such a finding is consistent with Lemert's argument that, although mass media claim to provide information to audiences so that individuals can act in ways consistent with notions of civic responsibility, they tend to downplay such information when dealing with sensitive, conflictive issues. The more conflictive the issue, the less readers are likely to see specific details about persons, places or things. Rather than seeing a reference to "John Schmidt, director of the Citizens Against the Dump organization headquartered in Oconto" (a fictitious name and organization), they might see a reference to "a local environmental advocate." We argue that the absence of such detail is not in the public interest in stories about such potentially high-impact objects as a high-level nuclear waste repository.

A study such as this is not designed to declare some newspapers "better" at covering environmental issues than others. No one has devised a "performance index" for the mass media, in part because consensus on what goes into such an index would be impossible. Instead, we have tried here to better understand some of the patterns underlying coverage of a dramatic environmental story. Despite our small number of newspapers, the findings give us added confidence in the argument that media behavior is largely framed by the social environments in which media organizations are embedded.

## Notes

[1] The authors would like to thank Deb Van Wormer and Marian Friestad for their assistance in data gathering and analysis. Funding for this study was provided by the Center for Environmental Communications and Education Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

[2] In a recent paper (Olien, Tichenor and Donohue, 1986), the University of Minnesota scientists reoperationalized structural pluralism. We have continued to use the earlier operationalization.

[3] Population counts were obtained from 1980 Census data. Counts of businesses were obtained from the 1986-87 Wisconsin Business Directory. Voluntary organizations were gleaned from telephone book yellow pages by looking under the category "Social Service Organization." The number of religious denominations was also obtained by examining the "Churches" heading in telephone book yellow pages. In two cases where the yellow pages did not provide information on churches, the white pages were searched in their entirety. Data for the school variable came from Basic Facts About Wisconsin's Elementary and Secondary Schools 1985-86, a publication of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. The proportion of minority students and proportion of privite school students for each community were summed.

Table 1. Extent of Mobilizing Information by Degree of Plurality

| | Degree of structural pluralism | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | High | Medium | Low |
| | (1181)* | (1015) | (256) |
| Percentage of complete MI | 22.3 | 24.2 | 34.1 |
| Percentage of partial MI | 51.2 | 42.0 | 37.7 |
| Percentage of nonexistent MI | 26.6 | 33.8 | 28.2 |
| Total | 100.1 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

*These numbers represent the total number of mobilizing information opportunities across the four newspapers in each pluralism category.

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# MEDIA AND PROTEST

C.N. Olien, P.J. Tichenor and G.A. Donohue

Media have traditionally been seen as vital resources for organized social protest. Groups concerned about environmental degradation, rights of minorities and abuses of political power regularly look to media to transmit their views to the larger society and its centers of power. A historically-held belief is that media are not only available to social protest, but have an obligation to report grievances as well as any conditions of the environment which the public an interest in and, therefore, has a right to know.

Reporting social disparities is at the heart of the belief that media are a "Fourth Estate," performing a watchdog role in society. This idea traces back to 17th and 18th century European views, often attributed to Edmund Burke and Thomas Carlyle, that parliaments, the nobility, and religious agencies can never perfectly represent all classes, interests, inequalities and shades of opinion (Carlyle, 1841; Boyce, 1978). In this conception, the press is a necessary channel, independent from the other Estates and a safety valve for social strains.

By reporting dissension, the Fourth Estate provides an alternative source of information that government and other institutions either do not possess or will not divulge. As Boyce (1978) views early journalistic ideology, the Fourth Estate was seen as "the instrument by which the aggregate intelligence of the nation criticizes and controls" all of the various divisions of the ruling classes. In the case of environmental issues, this would call for wide sharing and debating of views in the media, in the interest of addressing and rectifying the problems.

Appealing as the Fourth Estate view of media has been for centuries in Western political thought, it is largely a myth in terms of social structure. Newspapers, television, radio and magazines are organized agencies within an interactive and interdependent matrix, responding to centers of power in various other institutional areas. In modern society, government and business are the dominating institutions and the media are as influenced by those power centers as are other agencies. This interaction is not an even-handed exchange, since media as part of the matrix are deferential to power. Indeed, it has been argued by some historians that maintenance of the "Fourth Estate Myth" in 18th century England served to legitimate the development of a press which was largely under control of the existing commercial and political establishments (Boyce, 1978; Curran, 1977).

Potential subservience of American media to economic interests was a central theme in the Hutchins Commission's critique of the press (Hutchins, 1947). The assumption was that increasing concentration of control and dependence upon advertising were leading the media to more concern about pleasing business interests than about reporting diverse views. Since the Hutchins report and the objections to it raised in the media, a flow of academic studies has supported the report's basic premise of economic control. One of the earliest studies was by Warren Breed (1958), who demonstrated that news reports tended to be devoid of issues that would be inconvenient to advertisers. Another was Janowitz' analysis (1952) of the integrative role of the community press, avoiding conflict and reflecting rather than molding community attitudes. Further evidence is offered by Lemert and Larkin (1979), who found that citizens who succeeded in getting their letters to editors tended to be higher status individuals who expressly avoided "mobilizing" information. An interpretation is that this practice, based on editor-writer agreement, is a part of a conflict management process which the leadership controls.

Further research has elaborated the role of the press in supporting community power centers, particularly in how performance of this role varies according to community structure. Edelstein and Schulz (1963) found leaders of a small community favoring non-reporting of conflict until after leadership groups had discussed the issues. In a Minnesota study, editors in more homogeneous communities were found to be the least likely to report controversial events regarded as disruptive to local power relationships (Olien, Donohue and Tichenor, 1968).

Conflict management in the interest of supporting authority structures has been analyzed in a number of studies. In an intensive case analysis, a Duke University team identified a variety of mechanisms by which local print media reinforce the city council and city agencies. News reports would make proceedings appear more sequential and orderly than an on-the-scene observer would find them to be. Senior citizens and other groups with minimal power would be either ignored in press reports or treated in disparaging ways (Paletz, Reichert and McIntyre, 1971). Several investigators have delineated specific reporter techniques for "framing" stories about conflict issues in ways that appeal to mainstream values and legitimize existing power relationships. These techniques are elaborated in investigations by Tuchman (1978), Molotch and Lester (1975), Gitlin (1980), Gans (1979), Dreier (1983), Fishman (1980), Morley (1976), Murdoch (1973) and Paletz and Entman (1981).

Media view interest groups as society views them and systematically reinforce the current mainstream. Dreier (1983) points out that in national conflicts, the current focus is on power actors who are near although slightly to the right of the center. Shoemaker (1984) finds that media treat groups at both political extremes as illegal, unstable and morally questionable--that is, as illegitimate. In her analysis, Communists and Ku Klux Klan received less prominent display in news stories and were treated as unfavorable in character. The League of Women Voters, NAACP, and the National Rifleman's Association were all treated as relatively high in character although the NAACP received far less prominence in story display than the other two (25). The implication is that the National Association for Colored People is treated in the system as having an accepted way of protesting, although it is minimal protest in the view of more extreme groups.

## Protest in a Social System

Mass media may serve as "watchdogs," but their watchdogging is on behalf of mainstream power groups. The nature, timing and duration of this role in the life of a social movement may vary substantially from one movement to another. It will also vary according to the structure within which the movements occur. Media report social movements as a rule in the guise of watchdogs, while actually performing as "guard dogs" for mainstream interests.

Social movements grow out of societal tensions that relate directly to central values and social power relationships. The Civil Rights movement stemmed from a basic contradiction between formally stated, historically claimed societal values about equal rights and the demonstrably unequal treatment accorded Black persons and other minorities. It was in every sense of Myrdal's term "An American Dilemma" (1944). Powerful agencies in business, industry, religion and government maintained the Jim Crow atmosphere and the attendant disparities in treatment and opportunity.

Similarly, the environmental movement arose in a climate of decades-old concern for preservation of certain natural resources, alongside the question of whether modern industrial and agricultural production were threatening human health directly. The power issue arose from claims that long-term threats to the environment were being promulgated by major industries and government agencies. The movement led to both new agencies and new agency procedures, but it must be remembered that agency regulations, like laws, are control mechanisms that serve to stabilize the system through containing issues rather than resolving them in terms sought by proponents of civil rights, environmental, or other ideologies.

A Fourth Estate perspective might imply that movements center around mass media, or that media create social movements. Since media lack independent knowledge-gaining resources, and are structured to be subservient to dominant power institutions, it is inconceivable that they would initiate social protest on any major scale. Social movements begin with small but highly involved sets of concerned people seeking to identify and articulate a problem, develop an organizational base, and establish legitimacy, often as a precondition to media coverage.

Ultimately, definitions of social problems emanate not from initiating groups but, instead, from interactions within the dominant power and influence structures that often take over. The environmental movement at the outset appeared as a frontal challenge to the agricultural and chemical industries, to academic agricultural research and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. All had advocated usage of a wide range of chemical products for pest and plant control, products which many conservationists and research biologists viewed as harmful to wildlife and human health. This was the message of Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring," the kind of book which typically appears as an early articulation of a movement.

Social protests without a legitimized power base may be ignored by established groups, or given cursory and even ridiculing acknowledgment. One organized response to "Silent Spring" was to view the movement as an insurgent uprising to be quelled quickly in the interest of protecting existing food production methods. The environmentalist movement did, however, establish a political power base by the mid-1960's, and agricultural and industrial groups then shifted from a position of summary rejection to one of accommodation and cooptation.

Continuing dependency upon agricultural chemicals contrasts sharply with early exhortations from some environmentalists to shift to insect control policies based upon biological rather than petro-chemical principles. Regulatory agencies often served to slow rather than hasten restrictions on use of diethylstilbestrol in cattle feed, vinyl chlorides in manufacturing, and potential carcinogens in products for human consumption (Brown, 1984). Even though an environmental bureaucracy with voluminous rules developed, the chemical approach to pest control remained as basic social policy, and there is little evidence of this policy being seriously questioned in mass media.

One of the consequences of this bureaucratization is a further shift of control over environmental decisions, away from local communities, and toward groups of governmental professionals who are responsive to criteria that are often foreign to local communities. Extensive and routinized reporting of environmental regulations and regulatory processes, including impact statements, inspections and disposal of wastes have served to reinforce the status of the agencies involved.

## Media and Stages of Social Protest

The Environmental Movement typifies the role of the mass media not as a Fourth Estate watchdog for powerless groups, but as an integral part of the process of accommodation of social protest. In performing this role, the media reinforce the bureaucratic structures of the system. With growing pluralism and vying for power, American society has become increasingly bureaucratized, with extensive rules and regulations administered by agencies.

These rules operate to (a) bring about some idea of equity for protesting groups and (b) develop procedures for control of groups and thereby maintaining the system. Growth of bureaucratic regulations in the 1960's provides ample evidence of this development, with environmental rules and regulations being a case in point. In an extensive analysis of environmental content in American magazines between 1959 and 1979, Strodthoff, Hawkins and Schoenfeld noted that the most prominent clustering of federal environmental policy decisions occurred in the late 1960's and early 1970's. This period was preceded in time by increase in relevant content in special interest magazines and followed by increased environmental content in general audience magazines. The investigators interpreted this finding as supporting the earlier postulate that environmental issues were initiated by professional and interest groups, followed by specialized publication and attention in government and then by general mass media attention and public concern (Strodthoff, Hawkins and Schoenfeld, 1985; Tichenor, Donohue, Olien and Bowers, 1971).

Coverage by the general mass media, such as newspapers, TV, radio and popular magazines, is part of a process of acceleration rather than initiation of movements. This coverage is limited, however, and highly selective. What appears in the media often covers a minuscule amount of time in the life of a movement. Much of the history of a movement involves behind-the-scenes organizational activity and marshalling of support from legitimizers whose support would be lost if its existence were to be publicized. It takes extensive international connections and years of organizing resources to launch a ship whose primary purpose is to protest whaling, nuclear tests in the South Pacific and killing seals for fur. Similarly, groups involved in saving of the Bison, creating national parks and promoting soil conservation interacted continuously for decades, sometimes with and often without mass media publicity. The spectacular media events, such as those of the Farmer's Holiday Movement of the 1930's, Labor-Management struggles, the Nonpartisan League in the 1915-22 period in North Dakota and Minnesota and the recent "Tractorcade" protest in Washington D.C. are important public symbols of the movement, but do not reflect the long periods of organizational development and change which precedes and follows the media strategies.

## Media and Social Conflict

Conflict, on both sides, is part of social stabilization rather than destabilization. This is particularly apparent in the accommodations that occur to defuse tense situations, as occurred with the role of governmental agencies. These accommodations occur in such a fashion that the threat to the system is minimized, which means that conflict processes are not without rules. Conflict is acted out within a controlled process, which serves as a safety value. Established groups are as concerned about preserving their power as protesting groups are about increasing theirs.

Protests are subject to technical innovations, in both physical and social technology. A given crisis may bring forth modes of media strategies unknown before. The industrial "sitdown" strike was an innovation in its time, as were the techniques of campus protesters in the 1970's and the more recent "tractorcade" protesters in Washington D.C. While these innovations are reported, the press tends to over-represent the status quo and thereby reinforces it.

Conflict varies according to structure. It tends to be a more routine and commonplace character in structures which are more pluralistic and have a more formalized structure for accommodating it. Urban centers have wide arrays of employment opportunities, governmental agencies, political units, courts, educational resources and religious and ethnic groups. Formal relationships become established among agencies and interest groups for managing and containing conflicts that may arise. Labor-management procedures, formal hearings, professional counseling and formalized negotiations are among the mechanisms that pluralistic structures develop for resolving issues and minimizing disruption of the power relationships within the system.

Newspaper and broadcast reporting of issues is part of this conflict management and accommodation process. In small and more homogeneous communities, media tend to avoid reporting of conflict that would threaten the stability of the power structure, which operates as an oligarchy and typically makes decisions by consensus. Many of the conflicts that are reported are likely to be with external agencies, such as a 1975-1978 protest against establishment of a high voltage powerline in a rural area.

Differences in perception of press role were studied in a 1980 survey among leaders in 10 small communities, including five in Southwestern Minnesota and five in Northeastern Minnesota. The Northeast was treated as a more pluralistic region because of greater ethnic diversity, greater interdependence with urban centers, and low dependence on agriculture (Donohue, Olien and Tichenor, 1985).

Leaders in the more pluralistic Northeast were more likely than leaders in the less pluralistic region to agree that the local newspaper "takes the initiative in reporting controversy" (72 percent vs. 44 percent, Table 1). Also, 39 percent of the public affairs reports in the newspapers in the five northeast communities contained controversy, compared with 16 percent in the Southwest. On the whole, the evidence suggests that the newspapers in the more pluralistic structure are more likely to report conflict and that the leadership recognizes the role.

Table 1. Community Leader and Editor Perceptions of Role of the Press in More and Less Pluralistic Regions.

| Percent agreeing that: | Leaders in less pluralistic regions (n:79) | Leaders in more pluralistic regions (n:76) |
|---|---|---|
| Newspaper "takes initiative in reporting controversy" | 44% | 72%* |
| Percent of newspaper articles containing controversy | 16% | 39%* |

* $p < .01$

Several Minnesota studies support the conclusion that leaders of established agencies and more powerful groups tend to perceive mass media as more helpful to their organizations than do leaders of less established groups (31). The relevant studies include a 1978 survey of leaders quoted about local issues in media in two communities, a similar study of sources in four other communities in 1980, and a 1979 study of sources quoted about the American Agriculture Movement (AAM). The responses from "established" and "less established" sources from these studies are combined for presentation here (Table 2).

Elected and appointed officials, business leaders and leaders of farm groups appear less likely than citizen groups leaders, individual citizens, or student group leaders, to regard the media as explicitly positive or negative. This is particularly apparent in the 1978 and 1980 community studies and suggests an important point about the type of relationship that exists between media and established groups. Viewing media as neither helpful nor harmful in effect means the media are no threat. It does suggest that while some established leaders may view media with open favor, others maintain detachment by holding reporters at arm's length.

Table 2. "Helpfulness" of Media as Seen by Leaders of Different Groups of News Sources

| | Sources who represent "more established" interests@ (n:91) | Sources who represent "less established" interests* (n:57) |
|---|---|---|
| View media as helpful to own organization | 61% | 35% |
| View media as neither helpful nor harmful | 21% | 7% |
| View one medium or more as harmful | 18% | 58% |
| Total | 100% | 100% |

@ = elected and appointed officials, leaders of older farm organizations, administrators of agricultural agencies, company management personnel.

* = leaders and members of neighborhood citizen groups, American Agricultural Movement, individual citizens and students protesting the administration of an environmental center.

Among the 57 "less established" sources, the most pronounced criticism of media was from citizen leaders in the 1978 community study, and among the AAM members. A typical complaint in the community setting was that the local media favored the city council's position over that of neighborhood groups in a dispute over modification of a bridge in a major street through a regional city. The groups contended that their objections about implications for local traffic patterns were not given adequate hearing by either the council or the local newspaper.

The interviews with the AAM leaders were gathered during months following a nationally-publicized "tractorcade" demonstration that involved thousands of farm tractors driving down streets and boulevards in Washington, D.C. in protest of low farm prices and cost-price structure that threatened the survival of some farm operators. The AAM leaders were favorable toward local newspapers in their home communities, where local leadership and local editors saw farm survival as a problem of community survival and were thus supportive of the tractorcade. Minneapolis and St. Paul newspapers, however, as well as national newspapers, were seen by AAM members as openly hostile because of their prominent coverage of physical damage done in the Nation's capital by tractors. This, the AAM members said, disparaged their movement and detracted from the basic issues involved.

Officials of state and federal agricultural agencies, and of farm organizations that predated AAM, were largely untouched by the reporting of the tractorcade. As officials of agencies with regulatory functions in agriculture, or of older and more conservative farm organizations, they had received perfunctory coverage during the tractorcade events. Their media statements had been largely expressions of detached sympathy for the problem, but not outright support for the demonstration. In this setting, some leaders in established agencies saw media as helpful to their organizations. Others saw no particular "helpfulness" from media but saw no harm being done, either. Media coverage had not centered on responsibility of these established groups for the farm problems and their leadership had come through the tractorcade events relatively unscathed. This is a typical outcome when established power groups stand aside and limit their statements to qualified legitimacy during a crisis.

## Acceleration, Deceleration, and "Cooling Out" Processes

While media in a protest serve largely to reinforce existing power relationships, they are integral to the process, often serving both accelerating and decelerating functions. They are part of controversy acceleration, in that providing coverage of countervailing views gives attention to them and, in placing them on the public agenda, gives them a measure of legitimacy as an item for priority attention. Such coverage may be simultaneously instrumental to organizational goals of protesting groups and to cooptation goals of established centers of political and economic power. The movement gets attention. Established powers have considerable control over the nature of that attention and the means for resolving the issues in a way that maintains the stability of their own positions.

The way in which media coverage occurs over time was studied over a three-year period, in a controversy involving establishment of a 400-kilovolt, direct-current line across Minnesota in the late 1970's. This technology, largely untested in the U.S. at the time, was proposed and finally constructed so as to transmit electrical power from the coal fields of North Dakota to the power distribution grid in Minnesota. It was proposed initially as preferable to building another coal-fired power plant in Minnesota and hauling coal from 400 miles away. The powerline was regarded by a wide range of small town groups as (a) an usurpation of local rights and an improper application of the principle of eminent domain and (b) a threat to human and animal health because of use of new transmission technology that was untested in the U.S. (Olien, Donohue and Tichenor, 1984).

The controversy went through three separate although partially overlapping phases. There was an initial problem definition phase, from mid-1974 to late summer, 1975 when the power utility sought, but failed, to get landowners individually to sign easements for the line across their line. A following bureaucratic confrontation phase included a period of governmental and court-type action for adjudicating questions of line location and need. This involved extensive hearings with the utilities and countervailing groups in adversarial postures and a state environmental agency serving as a "neutral" party, holding the hearings but ostensibly not favoring either side. The hearings were followed by a period of legal moves for injunctions and growing visibility of protesting groups who sought to have the line construction prevented, based on the technical argument of unproved safety and appealing to values about community rights and the sanctity of private property.

The Minnesota Supreme Court in September 1977 ruled that the line could be built, since opposition groups had not met the burden of proving that the line would be hazardous to human or animal health. This marked the beginning of the final phase of the controversy. It was a confrontation stage, starting with condemnation procedures and construction, and accompanied by a variety of media events organized by the protest groups. These included picketing, blocking movement of construction equipment, flag waving, singing, spraying ammonia gas at a construction site and giving flowers to highway patrolmen. A few altercations occurred, several protesters were arrested, property damage occurred and a utility guard was shot and injured slightly.

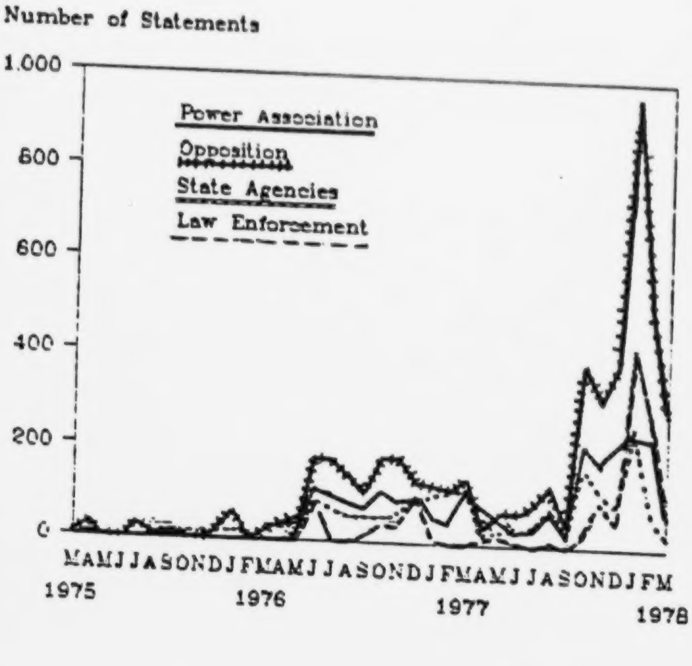
Media coverage of this controversy began largely in small town weekly papers in the affected communities and in daily newspapers in nearby regional cities. It then progressed, in order, to metropolitan daily newspapers and, at the point where field confrontations began, to television.

Newspaper content in a metropolitan daily newspaper and the daily newspaper of a regional city was analyzed throughout the 1975-78 period. The analysis included a count of total statements contained in the coverage according to attribution of those statements. Figure 1 includes the time trend in statements in these two newspapers attributed to (1) the power utilities; (2) the groups protesting construction of the powerline by the utilities; (3) state and federal agencies and (4) law enforcement agencies.

Coverage of the issue as a whole had an early peak in late 1976 and early 1977 which was a period following the hearing and leading into a confrontation phase, first in the courts. There was a bit of a cooling off period in mid-1977 when a variety of mediation efforts were attempted but which did not succeed. Following the Supreme Court decision to allow the line to be built, demonstrations in October 1977 were organized at the construction sites and coverage then reached a maximum far beyond the coverage at earlier periods. It should be added that TV coverage was at a maximum in the same period.

Figure 1 indicates that indeed, protest groups can succeed in gaining extensive media attention to their statements through the employment of media strategies. The peaks in attention from June 1976 through January 1978, with a few exceptions, are higher at each point than for the utilities, state agencies, or law enforcement agencies. Throughout the entire period, the statements attributed to the protest groups in these newspapers totalled about 40 percent of all such attributions, with 18 percent attributed to the utilities and 42 percent to state agencies and law enforcement agencies combined.

Figure 1. Statements attributed to different groups in powerline controversy over time.



It may seem that this extensive coverage of the protest group reflects an active, watchdog-type surveillance role of the newspapers. It is important to take into account the nature of the powerline issue and its relevance. The groups protesting did draw attention to the external, metropolitan-based organizations as acting against the interests of small, rural communities. In a midwestern state, the cultural value placed on survival of small-town institutions and values is high in spite of a general preference for the amenities of metro areas for places to reside. Also, as the controversy developed, the fundamental issue became that of eminent domain, with protest groups contending that the decision was being railroaded through without their getting a fair hearing. Various polls showed considerable statewide support for the protest groups which appeared based on the generalized belief that if unwanted structures of this type could be forced on these small towns, it could happen to all such places. Thus, while the utilities justified their position on the basis of societal needs for electrical power, the protest groups were also speaking to a societal-level value.

Two points about the media coverage are important for their interpretation. First, the coverage of these papers followed the organizational and problem-definition period of 1975, and did not precede it. This is consistent with the explanation that media play accelerating rather than initiating roles. Secondly, at the point of the heaviest coverage in late 1977 and early 1978, the coverage was not of a protest winning its point, but of a massive defeat. The highest court in the state had sanctioned construction, and protests after that point were presented by the media as a last-ditch struggle that was bound to lose. Note that by March 1978, which was after most construction was completed, coverage dropped off dramatically. It is also important to note that after the line was built, further activity included downing of some line towers and breaking of line insulators. These actions were referred to in media reports in March and later as "vandalism," which was a major delegitimizing reference.

A final point to be made about the powerline issue and the media coverage is that, in spite of all the media events, all the coverage and the attention it received, the final outcome was with few modifications exactly what the utilities had advocated at the outset. The public agencies overall received about as much attention as the protest groups and emerged with little if any loss of political influence. Also, the regional and metropolitan daily newspapers editorialized during the peak coverage period that the protest groups had a chance to be heard and should not allow the line construction to go ahead.

The powerline protest bears some similarity to a wide range of environmental issues, in that media event strategies succeeded in gaining heavy media coverage by drawing attention to basic values within the system. Indeed, this is a fundamental principle of protest strategy. An intensively organized protest against establishment of a new airport at Toronto, when protesting citizens literally faced down bulldozers, was similar in involving exercise of the eminent domain principle and its implications for loss of private property. As in the powerline case, objections were based heavily on environmentalist criteria.

Mass media, clearly, are information resources for social protest. It is also clear that in becoming part of social controversy, the media respond as principle agents of legitimacy within the system, not as independent fourth estate watchdogs.

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# TODAY'S COLLEGE YOUTH -- A GENERATION AT REST?

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Almost 20 years ago, Stapp suggested the goal of environmental educators was to produce a citizenry that is knowledgeable concerning the biophysical environment and its associated problems, aware and skilled in how to become involved in helping to solve these problems, and motivated to work toward their solution (Stapp, 1969).

One theoretical model proposed to account for variability in response to environmental education suggested it is the socialization process by which an individual acquires environmental attitudes, values and interests; knowledge of environmental problems; motivation to participate in environmental issues; and, a psychological identification with a reified group called "environmental activists" (Larson, 1984).

The term "socialization" is usually defined as: processes by which individuals learn to participate effectively in the social environment (Ware, 1972); as the whole process by which an individual develops, through transactions with other people, his/her specific patterns of socially relevant behaviors and experience (Zigler and Child, 1969); or the process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions that enable them to participate as more or less effective members of groups and society (Brim and Wheeler, 1966).

A key assumption of the socialization perspective is that to understand human behavior, researchers must specify social origins of that behavior and the processes by which it is learned and maintained (McLeod and O'Keefe, 1972).

In this particular model of the socialization process of environmental activists, several major categories of influence variables have been identified:

System Relevance:

When we look at a number of individuals collectively in a social movement, we can look at the body of shared knowledge, values, attitudes and behaviors that set that social movement apart from the rest of the population. As researchers, we need to discover the body of shared knowledge and environmental values, attitudes and behavior which maintain environmental activists as a social movement. What are the most effective means of building this social movement?

Content:

Environmental content is that information which is transmitted to new members of the environmental movement which results in persistence of that movement. We need to study variables such as environmental interest or concern, environmental information, party identification, organization belonging and left-right ideology, but we also need more explicit analysis of types of environmental content crucial to the effectiveness of environmental socialization.

Maturation:

If the circumstances of environmental learning are likely to affect its character and relative transience or permanence, then we should also analyze the development of environmental socialization across the life cycle. The developmental antecedents of social attitudes and behaviors are the goals of researchers looking at maturation from a socialization perspective. Longitudinal data bases are needed.

Generation:

In a second temporal dimension, generational variation results from differences in experiences of members of society who are born at different times, and these differences in experiences may become incorporated into the environmental socialization process. The research problem is to discover how different each generational experience has been or is likely to be and to understand what impact this difference and its effects may have when the new generation participates in environmental matters.

Action-Reaction Style, Cross-Cultural Variation:

This influence area concerns itself with variation in the socialization process across different government systems. One could conduct cross-cultural comparison research in different countries where environmental activism exists or where it does not appear to exist.

### Action-Reaction Style, Sub-Cultural and Group Variation:

Differences in environmental activism within cultures and between groups due to sex, SES, religious preference, regional and geographic variation and so on are the objects of analysis under this influence area. The research questions usually asked are: How extensive are these differences and how persistent?

### The Learning Process:

According to Dennis (1968), much socialization research looks at what the society does for the individual. He suggests an additional approach is needed where researchers observe the self-adaptive activities of the individual--how she or he attempts to make sense of an environmental system which he or she had no part in creating. This may include self-socializing activities as well as displays of resistance to society's socialization efforts.

### The Agencies:

To know who teaches what to whom in the socialization process, we need to identify which agencies have roles in given settings. How much influence does each have and what is the direction of influence? What factors explain the effects that each agent may have? The answers could vary from system to system, stratum to stratum, and early-to-late life-cycle periods, depending on how important a role was played by the agency.

### Interaction:

This influence area includes all social contact with other individuals, since communication is viewed as facilitating socialization, as well as being a product of that socialization. Mass media use is included in this area. We need to know media use patterns, information-seeking behavior and the importance of various interaction influences.

**Feedback:**

This influence area represents the individual's awareness of the actual efficacy and consequences of action, and responses from other persons regarding that action. These represent information to the individual, and we need to test under what conditions that information could stimulate further environmental socialization and action or perhaps lead to inaction.

**Environment:**

Sources of influence within this category include actual geographic or spatial reference, physical data and individual perceptions of one's natural and man-made or -influenced surroundings. We can analyze whether these physical and cognitive variables can stimulate or inhibit the socialization process.

## Research Findings

Thirteen years ago Larson developed five environmental-activism questionnaire items to investigate the variety and range of pro-environmental behavior in the general population. To distinguish environmental activism from general political activism, the five items were operationalized in the following manner:

1. If American citizens choose to do so, there are several things they can do to make their views known on public issues. In the past few years or so, have you attended public meetings or hearings about public issues? (Yes) (No)

1a. Did any of these contacts relate to environmental issues? (Yes) (No)

1b. Did you favor or oppose the environmentalist's point of view? (Favor) (Depends) (Oppose)

2. In the past few years or so, have you talked or written to community or county officials about public issues? (Yes) (No)

2a. Did any of these contacts relate to environmental issues? (Yes) (No)

2b. Did you favor or oppose the environmentalist's point of view? (Favor) (Depends) (Oppose)

3. In the past few years or so, have you talked or written to state or federal officials about public issues? (Yes) (No)

3a. Did any of these contacts relate to environmental issues? (Yes) (No)

3b. Did you favor or oppose the environmentalist's point of view? (Favor) (Depends) (Oppose)

4. In the past few years or so, have you signed a petition? (Yes) (No)

4a. Did this petition relate to environmental issues? (Yes) (No)

4b. Did the petetion favor or oppose the environmentalists point of view? (Favor) (Depends) (Oppose)

5. In the past few years or so, have you joined an organization which concerns itself with public issues? (Yes) (No)

5a. Does this organization concern itself with environmental issues? (Yes) (No)

5b. Does this organization favor or oppose the environmentalist's point of view? (Favor) (Depends) (Oppose)

At least one-third of the political activism reported in a statewide random sample of adults involved pro-environmental activism. Table 1 also shows a very strong commitment to pro-environmental behavior by a select sample of environmental activists, as almost three-fourths of this select sample participated in each of the environmental-activism items.

Table 1. Reported Participation Levels (Percentage) in Political Activism and Pro-Environmental Activities for a Statewide Random Sample and the Madison Select Sample of Environmental Activists. (from Table 3, Larson, Forrest and Bostian, 1981)

| Sample Political and Environmental-Activism Items: | Statewide Random Sample (N=544) | Madison Select of Environmental Activists (N=164) |
|---|---|---|
| Attend public meetings or hearings about public issues | 26.8 | 88.4 |
| Attended public meetings or hearings about environmental issues and favored the environmentalist's point of view | 11.7 | 75.0 |
| Talked or written to community or county officials about public issues | 29.9 | 84.1 |
| Talked or written to community or county officials about an environmental issue and favored the environmentalist's point of view | 9.9 | 73.8 |

Table 1 continued

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Talked or written to state or federal officials about public issues | 25.7 | 90.2 |
| Talked or written to state or federal officials about an environmental issue and favored the environmentalist's point of view | 8.4 | 80.5 |
| Signed a petition | 54.2 | 92.1 |
| Signed a petition that favored an environmental issue | 20.4 | 77.4 |
| Joined an organization that concerns itself with public issues | 13.0 | 90.2 |
| Joined a pro-environmental organization | 6.9 | 83.5 |

## Socialization-Influence Variable--Maturaion

To analyze the development of environmental activism across the life cycle, a recent investigation was conducted to determine the commitment to pro-environmental behavior by today's college students.

In the spring of 1987, a random sample of 282 Humboldt State University students were surveyed by telephone. Trained student interviewers asked the respondents a variety of demographic and lifestyle questions, as well as the activism items listed above.

## Results

The results of this survey of pro-environmental behavior in this random sample of college students are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Reported Participation Levels (Percentage) in Political Activism and Pro-Environmental Activities for a Random Sample of Humboldt State University Students

| Political and Environmental-Activism Items: | Random Sample of Humboldt State University Students (N=282) |
|---|---|
| Attended public meetings or hearings about public issues | 44.3 |
| Attended public meetings or hearings about environmental issues and favored the environmentalist's point of view | 23.8 |
| Talked or written to community or county officials about public issues | 25.5 |
| Talked or written to community or county officials about an environmental issue and favored the environmentalist's point of view | 14.5 |
| Talked or written to state or federal officials about public issues | 33.0 |
| Talked or written to state or federal officials about an environmental issue and favored the environmentalist's point of view | 18.4 |
| Signed a petition | 79.4 |
| Signed a petition that favored an environmental issue | 46.4 |

Table 2 continued

| | |
|---|---|
| Joined an organization that concerns itself with public issues | 24.1 |
| Joined a pro-environmental organization | 14.2 |

This particular random sample of college students shows a higher level of pro-environmental behavior in all of the environmental activism items than the statewide random sample of adults shown in Table 1. At least one-half of the political activism reported involved pro-environmental activism.

The college students also were more active than the statewide random sample of adults in all but one of the general political activism items. The one exception was item #2: "Have you written or talked to community or county officials about public issues...."

As expected, the levels of participation shown in Table 2 dropped off as each environmental-activism item progressed from political activism to pro-environmental activism. One can also see a reduction in levels of participation as the degree of personal involvement or commitment drops for various activism measures (for example, from "signing a petition..." to "joining an organization...").

## Discussion

From a socialization perspective, these results suggest these college students are a very politically active group--not a generation as rest. Much of that activism involved pro-environmental activism, exceeding levels of pro-environmental activism found in a statewide random sample of adults. Given the average age of this sample of college students (mean = 26, with 26 percent of the sample under 21, 40 percent between 22 and 26, and 34 percent over 27), these results suggest environmental activism has been developed relatively early in the life cycle. Given that activism is positively correlated with education, we may also be seeing evidence of a sub-cultural variation in our society, i.e., these differences are related to higher educational backgrounds for this sample compared to the statewide random sample.

One must also recognize that the statewide random sample of adults was conducted in another state, Wisconsin in 1974. Humboldt State University may also attract a particularly activist-oriented student body, in contrast with other campuses. Therefore, additional research is needed to replicate this study with current statewide random samples of adults and with other university students. Research with a younger population will also be necessary to determine when young persons begin participating in these types of activism behaviors.

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# A SITUATIONAL THEORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES, PUBLICS, AND ACTIVISTS

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Public opinion about the environment may seem to wax and wane as issues, personalities, and conflicts change from year to year. A spill of toxic waste, a James Watt in power, or a sit-in at the potential site of a nuclear power plant may seem to produce drastic changes in the public opinion polls.

There is no such thing, however, as a single public opinion. Rather, there are opinions of many publics. What waxes and wanes is not so much opinion as it is the number and level of activity of publics. Issues bring about publics, and publics come and go as events and personalities change and create issues.

Publics that arise around environmental issues present opportunities for environmental activist groups and threats for organizations whose behavior has adverse effects on the environment. Both kinds of organizations must communicate with environmental publics: activist groups to mobilize support and offending organizations to resolve conflicts that threaten their autonomy to pursue their goals.

This paper reviews the results of a program of research to develop a theory of publics. That theory is essentially a device to segment mass audiences, markets, or the "general public" into categories that are useful for targeting and planning communication programs. Much of the research done to develop this theory has been conducted on environmental publics, and this paper will be largely devoted to that research.

The theory that has resulted from the program of research provides answers to the following questions, each of which has great relevance for environmental communicators:

What are publics and how do they arise?

With which publics is it possible to communicate and how can one communicate most effectively with each kind of public?

What communication effects are possible with each kind of public?

When and why do members of active publics join activist groups?

How do activist publics differ from publics that have an intellectual interest in an issue but do not get actively involved with the issue?

The program of research reviewed here has pursued each of these questions, essentially in the order presented. As research has answered each of the questions, the results have made it possible to expand and improve the theory of publics. With each improvement, the theory also has become of greater practical relevance for communicators. We turn first, therefore, to a basic statement of the theory and then review research that has progressively added building blocks to that theory.

## A Theory of Publics

Segmentation is a widely accepted conceptual device in marketing. Other kinds of professional communicators talk a lot about segmenting their audiences, but in practice most attempt to communicate with vaguely conceived general audiences.

In marketing, segmentation has been defined as "target marketing" as opposed to "mass marketing" (Kotler & Andreasen, 1987, p. 119), a "niche" as opposed to "mass" target market strategy (Cravens, 1982, p. 167), or "segregation" as opposed to "aggregation" (Lovelock & Weinberg, 1984, pp. 109-111). Market segmentation can be defined as "the process of taking the mass market for consumer or industrial goods and breaking it up into small, more homogeneous submarkets based on relevant distinguishing characteristics" (Michman, 1983, p. 127).

Marketing theorists (e.g., Kotler & Andreasen, 1987, pp.117-155; Lunn, 1986, pp. 392-398) have provided practitioners with long lists of segmentation concepts, including demographics, psychographics, values and lifestyles, clusters of postal zip codes, geographic regions, consumer behaviors, and situations.

Marketing theorists provide several criteria for choosing a concept for segmentation. In general, segments must be mutually exclusive, measurable, accessible, pertinent to an organization's mission, and large enough to be substantial. Most importantly, however, the market segments must have a "differential response" to market strategies (Kotler & Andreasen, 1987, p. 124).

Although developed in marketing, the general concept of segmentation is also important in planning other types of communication programs. In other communication fields, the differential response desired from segmentation is not the purchase of products or services but differential responses in communication behavior, cognitions and knowledge, attitudes, individual behavior, and behavior as part of activist groups.

Environmental communicators, for example, will be more effective if they can divide their audiences into segments more or less likely to attend to and respond to their messages. Public relations practitioners, especially, need to identify publics that differ in the extent to which they provide threats to and opportunities for their organizations.

Many public relations and other communication professionals have used such market segmentation concepts as demographics, psychographics, and lifestyles. However, these concepts would seem to predict "differential responses" to products and product messages better than they predict responses to the issues, problems, and conflicts that are the subjects of environmental public relations and communications.

The theory of publics presented here has been designed to predict the differential responses most important to public relations and other communication professionals: responsiveness to issues; amount of nature of communication behavior; effects of communication on cognitions, attitudes, and behavior; and the likelihood of participating in collective behavior to pressure organizations. As such, it is a unique theory, a theory similar to market segmentation theories but one that has been designed especially for other kinds of communication programs.

The theory begins with the assumption that John Dewey (1927) and Herbert Blumer (1946) first made about publics: publics arise around issues or problems that affect them (see also Grunig & Hunt, 1984, pp. 143-145). Dewey also recognized the crucial role that publics play in American democracy: after recognizing that problems affect them, publics organize into issue groups to pressure organizations that cause problems or to pressure government to constrain or regulate those organizations.[1]

Publics, therefore, begin as disconnected systems of individuals experiencing common problems; but they can evolve into organized and powerful activist groups. The concept of public, therefore, is extremely useful for journalists and public relations practitioners. Most public affairs reporting, for example, is about issues and the activities of issue groups; and the readers of stories about these issues and issue groups will probably be members of publics as I have defined them. Organizations need public relations because their behaviors create issues that create publics, which may evolve into activist groups that threaten the autonomy of organizations. Activist groups themselves use public relations to make publics aware of the effects that issues have on them and to organize the publics into the activist group itself.

Lowi (1979) has captured the role of publics and activist groups in American democracy with the concept he calls "interest-group liberalism." Interest-group liberalism is (p. 51):

> ...liberalism because it is optimistic about government, expects to use government in a positive and expansive role, is motivated by the highest sentiments, and possesses a strong faith that what is good for government is good for the society. It is interest-group liberalism because it sees as both necessary and good a policy agenda that is accessible to all organized interests and makes no independent judgement of their claims. It is interest-group liberalism because it defines the public interest as a result of the amalgamation of various claims.

Tesh (1984, p. 29) suggested the term "issue" rather than "interest" group because activist groups consist of people brought together by "deeply held beliefs about what is right" rather than as a result of their economic interests--as suggested by the traditional pluralist and critical theories of politics.

Boyte (1980, p. 7) argued that citizen activist groups provide a middle ground between classic conservatism, which supports large private corporations, and classic liberalism, which looks to large government bureaucracies to check and regulate corporations. Interest-group (or activist-group) liberalism, in contrast, looks to activist groups to "champion interests of ordinary people against unresponsive government and corporate structures."[3]

Environmental activist groups, obviously, have played a major role in formulating environmental policy, in challenging behaviors of corporations and other organizations that affect the environment, and in holding "public opinions" and influencing the opinions of environmental publics that have not yet reached the stage of activism. Ebbs and flows in the attention that the media, governments, and corporations pay to environmental issues, therefore, largely result from the number and intensity of activity of environmental publics.

How, then, can we explain the origins and behaviors of publics--the groups of such great importance to everyone concerned with environmental policy and communication related to that policy? My answer to that question is provided by a situational theory of publics.

The basic theory consists of two dependent variables (active and passive communication behavior) and three independent variables (problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement). Recent research has added cognitive, attitudinal, and behavior effects to the list of dependent variables.

The two dependent variables, active and passive communication behavior, can also be called information seeking and processing. Information seeking describes what Clarke and Kline (1974) called "premeditated information seeking"--the "planned scanning of the environment for messages about a specified topic." Information processing describes what Clarke and Kline called "message discovery"--"the unplanned discovery of a message followed by continued processing of it."

The independent variables are situational variables in the sense that they describe the perceptions that people have of specific situations, especially situations that are problematic or that produce conflicts or issues. The situational definition provides a logical connection between these concepts and the idea that issues, problems, or situations create publics. The three independent variables, therefore, can be defined as follows:

Problem Recognition. People detect that something should be done about a situation and stop to think about what to do.

Constraint Recognition. People perceive that there are obstacles in a situation that limit their ability to do anything about the situation.

Level of Involvement. The extent to which people connect themselves with a situation.

The theory states and previous research has confirmed that high problem recognition and low constraint recognition increase both active information seeking and passive information processing. Level of involvement increases information seeking, but it has little effect on information processing. Stated differently, people seldom seek information about situations that do not involve them. Yet, they will randomly process information about low-involvement situations, especially if they also recognize the situation as problematic.[4]

Because people participate more actively in information seeking than in information processing, information seeking and the independent variables that precede it produce communication effects more often than information processing. In particular, people communicating actively develop more organized cognitions, are more likely to have attitudes about a situation, and more often engage in a behavior to do something about the situation (Grunig & Ipes, 1983; Grunig, 1982).[5]

However, research based on the theory shows that cognitive effects occur more often than attitudinal effects. Similarly, the theory predicts whether people have an attitude or engage in a behavior but not whether that attitude or behavior supports or opposes the organization. The theory, in other words, makes no attempt to explain persuasion except to say that communication, either active or passive, is a necessary condition for persuasion to occur.

In early research on the theory, I used the eight combinations of the three independent variables to define kinds of publics and calculated probabilities for the likelihood that each of the publics will communicate actively or passively about a situation and that communication will have a cognitive, attitudinal, or behavioral effect (Grunig, 1982; Grunig & Hunt, 1984, pp. 155-158). In more recent research, I have used canonical correlation to identify publics with a high probability of active communication behavior on some or all of a set of situational issues included in the study.

In a typical study using the situational theory, I began by identifying several related situations that could bring about one or more publics. For example, I used eight issues in two studies of environmental publics, such as air pollution, extinction of whales, and strip mining (Grunig, 1983a). I then used survey questions to measure each of the independent and dependent variables for each issue. I then used canonical correlation to identify a pattern of situational perceptions and communication behaviors and effects, patterns that I then used to define publics.

Canonical correlation makes it possible to simultaneously correlate the independent and dependent variables of the situational theory--thus testing the basic theory. At the same time, canonical correlation produces one or more canonical variates that are much like the factors that result from factor analysis. The canonical variates can be used to identify publics arising from the set of situations studied--thus providing a segmented profile of actively and passively communicating publics that public relations and other communication professionals can use to target and plan their programs.

Originally, I believed this profile of publics would be unique to each set of situations studied. These sets of situtions have included environmental, public affairs, consumer, social responsibility, and employee issues (see Part III of Grunig & Hunt, 1984, for summaries of most of these studies). However, the canonical variates produced by this research have defined four kinds of publics consistently enough to assume they have theoretical regularity (see Grunig & Hunt, 1984, pp. 159-160). They include:

All-issue publics. Publics active on all of the issues studied.

Apathetic publics. Publics that communicate little about any of the issues.

Single-issue publics. Publics active on one or a small subset of a set of issues, usually on an issue that concerns only a small part of the population, such as the slaughter of whales or the infant-formula controversy.

Involving-issue-only publics (also called "hot-issue" publics). Publics active only on a single issue that affects nearly everyone in the population and that receives extensive media coverage (such as the gasoline shortage, drunken driving, or toxic waste disposal).

In recent research (Grunig, 1987), I also determined the extent to which members of each of these publics become members of activist groups (predicting collective as well as individual behavior) and the reasons why members of active publics join activist groups.

In addition, in research not yet reported, I have reconceptualized the three independent variables of the theory as either internal or external to the individual: internal and external problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition. This internal vs. external conceptualization makes it possible to explain why some publics are active only in a cognitive, intellectual sense and why others become active in a behavioral sense.

In the rest of this paper, I review the research on environmental publics and, when relevant to understanding progress on the theory, research on other types of publics. The review is ordered according to the questions asked at the beginning of the paper, beginning with questions about the nature of environmental publics and their communication behavior.

## What Are Environmental Publics Like And How Do They Communicate?

In Grunig (1977), I made the argument, for one of the first times, that there is no single "public opinion" about the environment or about all environmental issues. A review of the literature about environmental public relations, communication, and public opinion showed that polls consistently showed public opinion about the environment to be a "mile wide and an inch deep" (p. 40).

When presented with closed-end questions, people polled agreed that the environment is a serious national problem. When asked to name the most important national problems in an open-end question, however, far fewer people mentioned the environment. The reason: responses to open-end questions reflect personal, involving concerns; responses to closed-end questions reflect more of an intellectual interest or a simple parroting of the issues that have been on the media agenda.*

A study by Grove (1983) suggested that people who remember only environmental issues that are on the media agenda may have not only superficial cognitions about the environment but also may not be aware of the most important problems. Grove compared the environmental problems covered by newspapers around the Chesapeake Bay with the problems judged most important by scientists studying the bay. There was little correspondence. Newspapers covered political and economic problems related to the environment rather than environmental problems themselves. For example, Grove mentioned a series of stories about development along the shoreline of the bay that was more concerned with local political autonomy than with the protection of wetlands.

In Grunig (1977), I also reported evidence for the situationality or issue-orientation of public opinions. Different environmental issues brought different publics, and people concerned about the environment did not consider all environmental issues to be of equal concern.

Table 1 also shows that the situational variables of problem recognition, constraint recognition, level of involvement, and presence of a referent criterion were better predictors of information seeking, information processing, and the likelihood of joining environmental organizations than were demographic variables, measures of time spent in environmentally related activities, and use of environmental publications. The correlation with the likelihood of joining organizations was not a major concern when I wrote that article, but it now has taken on more importance as I have recently used the situational theory to predict membership in activist groups.

## TABLE 1
## Multiple Regression Analysis of Predictors of Information Seeking, Information Processing, and Likelihood of Joining Organizations

| | Information Seeking | | Information Processing | | Joining Organizations | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Simple R | Beta Weight | Simple R | Beta Weight | Simple R | Beta Weight |
| Problem Recognition | .27 | .25** | .34 | .29** | .34 | .30** |
| Constraints/a | .32 | .29** | .35 | .30** | .37 | .26** |
| Level of Involvement | .24 | .13** | e | e | .31 | .10** |
| Referent Criterion | .11 | -.02 | .11 | -.08 | .19 | .08 |
| Picture/b | .03 | -.06 | .07 | -.04 | .16 | .05 |
| Age | -.04 | -.01 | -.06 | .04 | -.10 | -.06 |
| Race/c | -.01 | -.05 | -.04 | -.10** | .004 | -.05 |
| Education | -.12 | -.39** | -.03 | -.37** | -.07 | -.27** |
| Income | .03 | .15** | .14 | .21** | -.03 | .02 |
| Sex/d | .003 | .09 | .01 | .06 | -.13 | -.09 |
| Knowledge | .03 | -.04 | .19 | .12** | .01 | -.14** |
| Husband's Occupation | -.06 | -.02 | -.06 | -.10** | -.11 | -.06 |
| Wife's Occupation | -.12 | -.05 | -.12 | -.07 | e | e |
| Time Hunting and Fishing | -.03 | -.13** | -.03 | -.13** | -.05 | -.15** |
| Time Commuting | -.06 | -.05 | .01 | .01 | -.06 | -.04 |
| Time Hiking | .13 | .07 | .23 | .16** | .11 | -.03 |
| Time Swimming | .05 | -.06 | .11 | -.11** | .07 | -.11** |
| Time Camping | .10 | .02 | .17 | .06 | .19 | .14** |
| Time Biking | .09 | .04 | .17 | .06 | .19 | .14** |
| Environmental Publications | .16 | .10* | .18 | .09* | .22 | .19** |
| Environmental Organizations | .08 | -.05 | .10 | -.09 | .11 | -.04 |
| Multiple R and R2 | .53 | .28 | .58 | .34 | .61 | .37 |

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*$p<.05$ **$p<.01$

a Positive scores indicate low constraints.

b Postive scores indicate picture of environmental deterioration.

c Postive scores indicate nonwhites.

d Postive scores indicate males.

e Did not enter step-wise regression.

Source: Grunig (1977)

Two major studies of environmental publics were reported in Grunig (1983a) from research that was funded in part by the National Wildlife Federation. The first study was conducted in 1976 on an urban sample from four major cities: Washington, Baltimore, Chicago, and Cleveland. The second study was done in 1977 with a sample from nine rural communities in Maryland, Missouri, and Washington state.

Eight environmental issues were included in each study: air pollution, the extinction of whales, the energy shortage, and strip mining in both studies; superhighways in urban areas, disposable cans and bottles, water pollution, and oil spills in the urban study; and dams and flood control projects, effect of pesticides on wildlife, fertilizer run-off in lakes and streams, and nuclear power plants in the rural study.

These two studies were among the first studies using the situational theory to identify the four kinds of publics described above: all-issue, special-or single-issue, hot-issue, and apathetic publics. Factor analysis of the eight produced one set of general environmental issues in each study and three special issues that did not load highly on the single factor produced. The special issues were air pollution, superhighways, and the energy shortage in the urban study and air pollution, energy, and whales in the rural sample. At the time, energy, air pollution, and superhighways were hot issues; and whales were a special-interest issue. Table 2 shows the results of the canonical correlation for the urban study.

The study also showed that the all-issue, general environmentalist public had the same upper social-economic characteristics that other studies of environmentalists had shown: well-educated, liberal, and upper income. People who normally would not be in environmental publics became members of hot-issue publics when issues such as the energy shortage and air pollution affected them directly. Other publics emerged strictly around special issues that did not affect everyone, producing single-issue publics: whales and superhighways. Demographic variables alone could not identify these publics, but they did help locate them and connect these publics to previous research on environmental communication.

### TABLE 2
### Canonical Correlation of Situational Perception Variables With Communication, Cognitive, and Knowledge Variables for the Urban Sample

|  | Pearson's Correlation with Variate |  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Direct Consequen-quences Variate | General Environ-mentalist Variate | Super Highway Variate | Unconcon-cerned Variate | Air Pol-lution Variate |
| Situational Variables |  |  |  |  |  |
| General Environmental Situations: |  |  |  |  |  |
| Problem Recognition | .27 | .81 | .16 | .18 | -.21 |
| Level of Involvement | .07 | .67 | .12 | -.14 | -.22 |
| Constraint Recognition | .32 | -.71 | -.01 | -.07 | -.19 |
| Referent Criterion | -.25 | .67 | -.21 | -.15 | -.06 |
| Air Pollution Situations: |  |  |  |  |  |
| Problem Recognition | .68 | .29 | -.13 | -.01 | .38 |
| Level of Involvement | .33 | .15 | .31 | -.21 | .02 |
| Constraint Recognition | .46 | -.51 | -.08 | -.17 | -.03 |
| Referent Criterion | -.64 | .41 | -.18 | -.20 | .28 |
| Superhighway Situation: |  |  |  |  |  |
| Problem Recognition | .30 | .27 | .37 | -.29 | -.05 |
| Level of Involvement | .24 | .16 | .33 | -.51 | .02 |
| Constraint Recognition | .57 | -.47 | -.19 | .18 | .03 |
| Referent Criterion | -.32 | .38 | .18 | -.60 | .18 |
| Energy Situation: |  |  |  |  |  |
| Problem Recognition | .47 | .10 | -.41 | -.39 | -.25 |
| Level of Involvement | .36 | .24 | -.56 | -.24 | -.11 |
| Constraint Recognition | -.14 | -.24 | -.04 | -.25 | .13 |
| Referent Criterion | .34 | .37 | -.22 | .04 | .11 |
| Communication/Cognitive Variables |  |  |  |  |  |
| General Environmental Situations: |  |  |  |  |  |
| Information Seeking | .06 | .50 | .12 | .22 | .35 |
| Information Processing | -.35 | .59 | .06 | .47 | -.04 |
| Idea | .31 | .58 | -.04 | .44 | .01 |
| Join Organizations | .01 | .61 | .38 | -.07 | .27 |
| Air Pollution Situation: |  |  |  |  |  |
| Information Seeking | -.24 | .44 | -.23 | .06 | .17 |
| Information Processing | -.25 | .30 | -.04 | .44 | .01 |
| Idea | -.32 | .11 | .07 | .06 | .24 |
| Join Organizations | -.87 | .30 | -.09 | .01 | .20 |
| Superhighway Situation: |  |  |  |  |  |
| Information Seeking | -.30 | .36 | .09 | -.03 | .17 |
| Information Processing | -.08 | .37 | .16 | .02 | -.22 |
| Idea | .24 | .00 | .12 | -.26 | .38 |
| Join Organizations | .09 | .19 | .52 | .02 | -.22 |

TABLE 2 (continued)

|  | Pearson's Correlation with Variate |  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Direct Consequences Variate | General Environmentalist Variate | Super Highway Variate | Unconconcerned Variate | Air Pollution Variate |
| Energy Situation: |  |  |  |  |  |
| Information Seeking | -.43 | .18 | -.09 | .19 | .04 |
| Information Processing | -.28 | .07 | -.18 | .00 | -.22 |
| Idea | -.23 | .20 | .15 | -.15 | -.04 |
| Join Organizations | -.12 | .26 | -.15 | -.02 | .28 |
| Knowledge | .22 | .61 | -.01 | .12 | -.39 |
| Canonical Correlation | .81 | .71 | .52 | .47 | .42 |
| Chi Squared | 687.63 | 459.60 | 308.16 | 242.08 | 188.91 |
|  | 272df | 240df | 210df | 182df | 158df |
|  | .001 | .001 | .01 | .01 | .05 |

Source: Grunig (1983a)

These studies also measured the extent to which each of the different publics were knowledgeable about the environment and the extent to which each held cognitions about the issues. Table 2, for example includes two of these effects variables--holding of an idea and knowledge. Most of the publics held an "idea," a cognition about the issues that brought about the public. And the all-issues public showed the most knowledge about the environment on a set of multiple-choice questions. Effects variables, however, will be addressed in more detail in the next section of this paper.

Several other studies of publics have been based on issues other than environmental issues, although one of two environmental issues have been included among the issues. As a result, these studies shed further light on the nature of environmental publics.

A study of issues related to corporate social responsibility, for example, included pollution among 11 issues (Grunig, 1979). That study used Q factor analysis, rather than canonical correlation, to identify publics. It identified three publics (p.755):

> (1) a large public that is aware of and interested in all of these possible areas of corporate social responsibility, but primarily in responsibilities that are indirect consequences of a firm's basic economic functions, (2) an active public concerned about all of the issues but charities, and (3) a public latent in many distant social issues but actively concerned about those issues that affect it directly.

Again, these publics can be considered as an all-issue public (number 2), a special-issue public (number 1) and a hot-issue public (number 3). In this case, however, pollution--admittedly a broad environmental issue--was high in problem recognition and involvement but also high in constraint recognition for all three publics. All actively communicated about the issue but felt there was little they could do about it.

A second study of corporate issues (Grunig, 1982) identified publics that formed around the four issues of nuclear power, the safety of the Ford Pinto, steel import policy, and the Nestle infant formula controversy. Nuclear power, of course, can be considered an environmental issue.

This study identified an all-issue public, a hot-issue public, and a special-issue public. The special-issue public arose around the steel and Pinto issues. Nuclear power, however, was the hot issue, the one that brought about publics that were unconcerned until an issue affected them directly. The activist publics, as shown in previous studies consisted of younger, better educated people who tended to be female.

Finally, Grunig (1983b) reported a study of publics among Washington reporters on issues of corporate public policy. These issues included deregulation of natural gas, break-up of the Bell system, chemical disposal sites, and acid rain. The study differed from others, however, in that the reporters were asked to respond to measures of the situational variables both for themselves and for their readers. As a result, canonical correlation identified publics that were publics of reporters, perceived publics of readers, and a combination of the two.

This study, too, identified the four kinds of publics found in previous studies. The self and reader measures of the situational variables produced two publics motivated mostly by individual information needs. One type, in particular, was motivated by the environmental situations. The other was personally motivated by the environmental issues but also by its perception that a reader public would be interested in the Bell system issue.

Both reporter publics were activists, especially on the environmental issues. The public motivated only by self perceptions of environmental issues also held antibusiness cognitions and attitudes. It consisted of younger and, more often, female reporters who covered the science or environmental beat in Washington.

One other reporter public, however. perceived, that readers would include an active environmental public although the reporters themselves were not such a public. An apathetic public consisted of reporters who did not actively communicate about any of these issues themselves but who did write articles about the environment, based on information that came to them passively, because they perceived that their readers would seek or process environmental information.

The hot-issue public in this study formed around the issue of deregulation of natural gas, which could be considered an environmental issue.

In summary, then, this research shows that there is a general, all-issues environmental public, even among reporters. There is also a public, even among reporters, that is apathetic about the environment. Other publics arise around special issues like whales or acid rain: people interested in that issue even though it does not involve them personally to any great extent. Most people, no matter how apathetic, however, will form into a hot-issue public for such all-involving issues as a shortage of energy, deregulation of natural gas, disposal of toxic waste, or nuclear power.

Next, then, we ask whether communication programs have different effects on these different kinds of publics.

## What Communication Effects Are Possible For Each Public?

In Grunig (1983a), I reviewed the literature on environmental communication, which I said had been preoccupied with finding empirical support for a cross-situational attitude paradigm. That literature essentially took a deterministic view of attitudes, assuming that attitudes govern behavior. If communication could change attitudes, the paradigm maintained, then communication could indirectly change behaviors. In the case of environmental communication and education, pro-environmental messages could create or maintain favorable attitudes that would, in turn, program people to behave in a way that would protect the environment in many different situations.

The recent research on communication and attitudes reviewed in Grunig (1983a), however, showed that theorists now conceptualize attitudes to be more situational and teleological than cross-situational and deterministic. Attitudes are situational in that people form different evaluations of solutions to issues as situations change.

People may have a cross-situational attitude, which I called a referent criterion--using Carter's

(1965) term. Situational attitudes, however, predict actual behavior much better than do cross-situational attitudes (see, e.g., Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Attitudes also are teleological--purposive--rather than deterministic in that people have the ability to control them. People evaluate solutions to issues more or less rationally when an issue is involving. They evaluate them superficially when the issue is less involving (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 255-271).

Finally, attitude theorists have come to recognize the effect that cognitions have on attitudes (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, pp. 225-252.) Messages often produce thoughts, which help people form attitudes. Cognitive responses are important, especially, when people develop attitudes in highly involving situations.

The situational theory, likewise, is a teleological, situational theory. It predicts when people will think and communicate purposively about situations. Logically, then, it should also be able to predict when they will develop cognitions and attitudes about issues. It cannot predict the nature and direction of cognitions or the valence of attitudes: people control those personally; messages do not control them deterministically.

Several studies have shown that active publics, as identified by the situational variables, are more likely to hold both attitudes and cognitions (e.g., Grunig, 1982, p. 189) and to hold organized cognitions (Grunig & Ipes, 1983) than are apathetic publics.

Other studies have looked for the kinds of attitudes held by the different kinds of publics and have tried to explain how these cognitions and attitudes vary with situations. In the environmental studies, the most common attitudinal and cognitive variables utilized have been the cognitive strategies formulated by Stamm and Bowes (1972).

Stamm and Bowes (1972) identified two basic orientations toward scarcity that he defined as attitudes about the environment: reversal of the trend toward scarcity and using a functional substitute to replace a scarce resource. Originally, Stamm and Bowes believed that people would use these attitudes cross situationally, that an individual would apply one of them consistently in different environmental situations. Their data, however, showed that people often advocated different solutions for different situations and that they sometimes chose both.

To explain those data, Stamm defined two "cognitive strategies," hedging and wedging. Hedging occurs when a person believes that both reversal of trends and functional substitutes should be used to resolve an environmental problem. Wedging occurs when an individual believes only one of the solutions should be applied.

My studies of environmental publics have shown that people do not consistently apply reversal of trends, functional substitutes, hedging, and wedging across situations (Grunig, 1983a; Stamm & Grunig, 1977; Grunig & Stamm, 1979). As the theory predicted, these are situational strategies. There was some regularity, however. In most situations, people tend to apply the solution that makes the most sense in a given situation (Grunig & Stamm, 1979, p. 719).

In general, however, the studies showed that environmental publics apply the reversal of trends solution across situations as a referent criterion. For most environmental situations, members of these publics use the reversal of trends strategy to wedge out functional substitutes. When a situation involves people personally, however, they hedge the reversal of trends solution and use the functional substitutes solution as well. When they must give up something personally in an environmental situation, that is, they are more willing to find a substitute resource at the same time they believe that people should stop using up a resource.

In three studies of publics forming around corporate policy issues, the concepts of hedging and wedging were used in a slightly different way. In two studies (Grunig, 1982; 1983b), respondents were asked the extent to which they believed several statements describing pro- and anti-business cognitions. Scores then were computed for the extent to which respondents wedged pro- or anti-business cognitions or held the two jointly (hedged).

In the third study (Grunig, 1979), respondents were asked the extent to which four groups (government, business, interest groups, and individuals) should be responsible for solving several social problems. A high hedging score meant that a respondent thought all four groups should be responsible. A low score meant that the respondent thought only one group should be responsible.

In the two studies of pro- and anti-business cognitions, the respondents who wedged--both the general respondents in the first study and Washington reporters in the second--generally did so with anti-business cognitions. Most members of both samples held anti-business cognitions across situations; when they held pro-business cognitions they wedged them by keeping the anti-business cognition.

Also, both studies showed that respondents held the strongest anti-business cognitions on environmental issues and that the more active the public the stronger the anti-business cognitions, especially on the environmental issues.

In the study of corporate social responsibility, the one environmental issue was pollution. For this issue, all publics hedged. They assigned the responsibility for solving the problem jointly to government and business. However, the most active public assigned more responsibility to government, suggesting that active publics may become more activist in pressuring government.

Two studies, Grunig (1982) and Grunig and Ipes (1983), showed that passive publics are more likely to hold attitudes than cognitions. Active publics are equally likely to hold both cognitions and attitudes. These results are consistent with the theory that cognitive responses generally precede attitudes, but only for actively communicating publics. Less active publics, however, express attitudes--at least in a survey--even when they have no cognitions. That conclusion would suggest that attitudes can be manipulated more easily for passive publics--often using manipulative communication devices--than for active publics. The attitudes would be more easily changed than those held by active publics, however.[7]

Finally, some of the studies of publics have also determined the extent to which different kinds of publics engage in individual behaviors. In general, behaviors are infrequent effects of communication programs for all publics (see, e.g., Grunig & Ipes, 1983, p. 49). Nevertheless, active publics are considerably more likely to engage in behaviors than passive publics and, therefore, more likely to use the information coming from a communication program as the basis for a behavior.

In the study of corporate issues (Grunig, 1982, p. 189), for example, the most active public had a probability of 52 percent of engaging in a behavior related to the issues, the least active public a probability of 6 percent. In addition, the probability of behavior was less than 20 percent for all but the most active publics.

One behavior that has been studied with great frequency by communication researchers has been the adoption of innovations (e.g., Rogers, 1983). Myers (1985) used the situational theory to explain the adoption of innovations that Maryland farmers could use to help reduce pollution of the Chesapeake Bay. In a canonical correlation, he used the three situational variables as independent variables and adoption of the anti-pollution innovations and several communication, media, and knowledge variables as dependent variables.

One canonical variate resulted. Problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition correlated .74, .66, and .80, respectively, with this variate. Adoption of innovations correlated .45, showing again that the more active the publics the more likely is behavior.

These studies, in summary, show conclusively that not only is communication with active publics more likely than it is with passive publics but that active publics are also more likely to hold cognitions and attitudes and to engage in behaviors than are passive publics. Passive publics may hold attitudes more often than cognitions, but these attitudes usually are weakly held and supported only by disorganized cognitions.

Communication, therefore, is more likely to produce each of these effects with active publics. It does not follow, however, that a given communication program will usually be effective in producing a change desired by the organization sponsoring the program. Active publics communicate with many sources of information; and their cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors will be formed from the composite of all information they receive, not from the information from a single program or campaign.

The studies also show that active environmental publics favor an activist stance toward the environment. They prefer reversing the trend toward scarcity of resources rather than finding functionally substitute sources--unless they are personally involved with an issue. If they stand to lose from reversing a trend, they are willing to hedge the two solutions. The active environmental publics also hold anti-business cognitions and attitudes and support governmental solutions to environmental issues.

Members of active environmental publics, then, seem likely to become members of activist groups championing the environmental cause and opposing organizations that despoil the environment. Next, we look at evidence showing that this is indeed the case.

## When And Why Do Members Of Active Publics Join Activist Groups?

In the Spring of 1983, James Watt was serving as Secretary of the Interior and environmental activist groups were expanding their membership and mobilizing their members to fight him. The time, therefore, was appropriate for a study to determine the kinds of publics that would be most likely to supply members for an activist group and to determine why people join activist groups.

Many of the targets of environmental groups, such as Watt, had argued that environmental groups do not represent their members. Many of these opponents could argue, for example, that members of the National Wildlife Federation, which opposed Watt's policies, had joined that organization to subscribe to a magazine and not because they opposed Watt.

Grunig (1987) reports the results of a study of members of the Sierra Club in the Washington-Baltimore area conducted that spring. First, the study determined whether all four kinds of publics--all-issues, single- or special issue-, hot-issue, or apathetic--would be found among members of an activist group. The study was based on four issues: disposal of toxic wastes, acid rain, slaughter of whales, and pollution of the Chesapeake Bay. Canonical correlation was used in the same way as in previous studies to identify publics.

Three of the four publics were identified. As might be expected, there was no apathetic public. There was an all-issues public, a special-interest public (for the whale issue), and a hot-issue public (for toxic waste and acid rain). The all-issues public, however, was most active in the Sierra Club and belonged to the largest number of environmental organizations. It had not belonged to the Sierra Club for any longer time than the other publics, however, primarily because many had joined because of the perceived threat to the environment provided by Watt.

As in the other studies, members of the all-issues public also were most likely to communicate actively about the issues, to construct organized cognitions about the issues, and to engage in individual behaviors related to the issues. Membership and activity in the Sierra Club added participation in collective behavior to this list of effects. Members of this active public also advocated reversal of trends as a solution to environmental problems and collective, governmental action as a mechanism for applying the solution. Again, these results were consistent with previous studies.

The second major purpose of the Sierra Club study, then, was to determine the reasons why members of active publics join activist groups. That question has practical relevance, to determine whether activist groups really represent their members. It also has theoretical relevance because the literature contains several theoretical explanations for why people join such groups.

Pluralists, for example, believed that people join interest groups to pursue common individual interests and that they participate in the group to secure these benefits. According to Moe (1980, p. 2), this "loosely structured theory of interest groups" served well until economist Mancur Olson published his Logic of Collective Action in 1965 (a revised edition was published in 1971).

Olson (1971) upset the conventional wisdom by arguing that participation in interest groups is not in the rational self interest of individuals unless the group is small or unless they are coerced to join or enticed to join by selective incentives. Olson based his theory on the concept of the collective good. Interest groups seek collective rather than individual goods, Olson argued. Once a collective good is made available to one person it must also be available to all. Examples include a clean environment, tax policy, or national defense.

Rational individuals, therefore, realize that they do not have to participate in the group to secure a collective good if someone else will do it for them. Sandman (1982, p. 19) explained Olson's theory well for environmental groups when he said that "rational self-interest dictates that (people) should pass the buck... Everyone is best off if someone else saves the environment."

In small groups, however, members realize that they must do their share or no one else will. Thus, small groups usually are more effective than large ones.

Large groups, such as labor unions, often must coerce members to join, as in the closed union shop. Other large groups seek members by providing selective incentives that are only marginally related to group goals. For example, the American Automobile Association provides insurance and towing; and many professional groups provide insurance, discounts on travel, or publications. The two largest environmental organizations, the National Wildlife Federation and the Audubon Society, provide members with a magazine. Many members may even be surprised to learn they belong to an environmental activist group (Sandman, 1982).

Olson's theory revolutionized thinking about interest groups, although other theories have been proposed more recently to supplement it. Moe (1980) for example, argued that Olson's theory applies only to economic interest groups. In economic groups, he said, economic motivations supercede political motivations. Tesh (1984, p. 30) added that "whether contested laws and policies will personally benefit group members or not remains for them an insignificant consideration."

According to Moe (1980, p. 6), people may join issue groups, to gain a sense of political efficacy, which is the belief that their contributions "make a difference" in providing some of the collective good. Olson could respond, however, that members make a greater difference in small groups.

Clark and Wilson (1961) and Wilson (1973) published a widely cited theory of incentives for people to join voluntary organizations. These include:

Material incentives, such as money or things and services that can be priced in monetary terms.

Solidary incentives, intangible rewards enjoyed by being a member of a group, such as "conviviability of coming together," prestige of membership, or collective status.

Purposive incentives, satisfaction from having contributed to a worthwhile cause even if the member "contributes nothing but his name."

When Moe (1980) studied several voluntary organizations, he found that all of these incentives provide people reasons to join voluntary organizations, although material incentives predominated in economic interest groups and purposive and solidary incentives in noneconomic groups.

The Grunig (1987) study, therefore, determined whether members of the Sierra Club joined because of one or more of Clark and Wilson's material, solidary, or purposive or Olson's selective incentives. The results showed that members of the active, all-issues public joined an activist group for purposive, political reasons. I coined the term "delegation of activism" to explain their reasoning. Members of this environmental activist group, at least, want to delegate their activism to affect policy, even though they do not benefit themselves. An activist group such as the Sierra Club does appear to truly represent its membership; those members do not join for selective or solidary incentives.

Thus, this study not only supported the situational theory, but it also supported the broader theory of interest-group liberalism, of which the situational theory seems to be a part. Members of active publics join activist groups. Thus, they provide opportunities for the activist groups themselves and threats for the organizations that do damage to the environment.

One question remains to be answered about environmental publics and activist groups: why do so many people appear to be concerned about environmental issues but yet do little about them? Why, in other words, is public opinion about the environment a "mile high and an inch deep." A new concept in the theory seems to provide an answer.

## How Do "Intellectual" Publics Differ From Activist Publics?

As conceptualized to this point, the situational theory has not distinguished between what might be called internal and external components of the three independent variables (problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition). Are the problems that are recognized in the person's mind or in the environment? Is involvement perceived or actual? Are constraints "real" or only perceived?

In past research, I have not believed that a distinction between the internal and the external components of the three concepts would be useful. A retrospective look at my research and at other concepts in the literature suggest, however, that the distinction might resolve some important theoretical problems related to science and environmental communication.

In Grunig (1974), for example, I examined the effects of several science writing devices on different publics, as identified by the concepts of problem recognition and constraint recognition. The measures of problem recognition and constraint recognition were external: "Is the problem discussed in this article important to you?" (problem recognition) and "Do you think ordinary citizens like you could use information like that presented here to have an impact on government policy?" (constraint recognition). Bartholomew (1973) did a similar study in which the measures were internal: "Are you interested in understanding physics?" (problem recognition) and "Do you feel you could understand physics if you wanted to? (constraint recognition).

Both studies produced similar results: the active publics, which were high in problem recognition and low in constraint recognition, read science stories more actively and learned more. The question that was not answered was whether different publics would have been identified if both the internal and external concepts had been measured for the same subjects and whether different writing techniques would have been more effective on the different publics.

Applied to environmental publics, the internal situational concepts would seem to identify the "intellectual" publics suggested in the literature: publics that are concerned about the environment but not active in doing something about it. The external concepts, on the other hand, would identify the publics actually engaged in individual or collective behaviors to do something about environmental problems.

A closer look at the differences in conceptualization of internal and external concepts should make the utility of the distinction clearer. For problem recognition, the distinction lies in the fact that problems that are recognized could be in a person's environment or strictly in his or her mind. Internal problems reflect curiosity or intellectual interests. External problems are problems with which an individual conceivably would have to deal in the real world.

The distinction between internal and external constraint recognition can be seen in Weick's (1969) cognitive theory of organizations. Weick stressed that the environment of an organization exists partly in the mind of the people in an organization who observe it and partly "out there." Thus constraints could be either internal or external.

Similarly, Bandura (1977) used the concept of "self efficacy" to explain why some information campaigns are effective and others are not.[8] If people believe they can do something about a problem, they are more likely to use information related to that problem. However, Bandura also argued that communication campaigns can increase self-efficacy by providing a model of how a change can be made. If self efficacy can be changed without making actual changes in constraints, then it must be based at least in part on an internal conception of constraints.

Salmon's (1986) extensive review of the literature on involvement, finally, identified what appears to be internal and external involvement. Internal involvement essentially is ego involvement, as described by Sheriff, Sheriff, and Nebergall (1965). External involvement is actual involvement in the situation.

A first study using the internal and external concepts was completed in Spring 1987 on the issue of

AIDS, which has not yet been published. Table 3 shows the results of a canonical correlation analysis to identify publics. In this study, two indicators were used for each of the independent concepts and three for information seeking and processing. The two indicators for external constraint recognition did not correlate, however, and were kept separate. One indicator seems to measure individual constraint and the second group efficacy.[9] The lack of correlation, therefore, shows that people may feel constrained as an individual from doing anything about an issue such as AIDS, but that they also may feel they can do something collectively. More work will be done, however, to clarify these additional concepts of constraints.

Table 3 shows that the active public for this issue had high correlations with all of the situational variables, both internal and external. That result suggests that externally involved publics also take an internal, intellectual interest in issues. The second variate in Table 3, however, identifies an "internal" public. It is characterized mostly by internal constraints: the inability to understand the AIDS issues. It also is somewhat identified by external constraint: the inability to do anything about the issue. It is also quite interesting that this public held the strongest negative attitudes, both situational and cross-situational about AIDS.

Although this study did not identify an "intellectual" public for the AIDS issue, it did identify a basically internal public. Thus, future research could identify purely intellectual publics on issues such as environmental ones.

### TABLE 3
### Canonical Correlation of Situational, Communication, and Effects Variables

| | Correlations with: | |
|---|---|---|
| **Independent Variables** | Variate 1 | Variate 2 |
| Internal problem recognition | .90 | .06 |
| External problem recognition | .91 | -.06 |
| Internal level of involvement | .74 | -.08 |
| External level of involvement | .69 | -.03 |
| Internal constraint recognition | .24 | .90 |
| External constraint recognition | .39 | .16 |
| External group efficacy | .44 | -.18 |
| **Dependent Variables** | | |
| Information processing | .94 | .02 |
| Information seeking | .66 | .09 |
| Actual processing | .14 | -.38 |
| Actual seeking | .13 | -.43 |
| Breadth of cognition | .21 | -.29 |
| Depth of cognition | .05 | -.79 |
| Presence of situational attitude | .22 | -.30 |
| Presence of cross-situational attitude | .22 | -.35 |
| **Canonical correlation** | .61 | .39 |
| N=202 | p.<.01 | p<.05 |
| **Correlations with Demographic Variables** | | |
| Age | -.03 | .01 |
| Education | .06 | -.20 |
| Liberal politics | .18 | -.11 |
| Male sex | -.19 | .01 |
| Unmarried status | .03 | -.22 |
| Black or Hispanic race | -.11 | .07 |
| **Correlations with Situational Attitudes** | | |
| Limiting oneself to a single sexual partner makes it possible to avoid getting AIDS | .35 | .11 |
| AIDS patients should be isolated from other people | .07 | .22 |
| Educating people about AIDS will solve the problem | .37 | .00 |
| **Correlations with Cross-situational Attitudes** | | |
| AIDS is God's way of punishing homosexuals and drug users | -.16 | .24 |
| More money should be spent on AIDS research even though AIDS has been limited mostly to homosexuals so far | .53 | -.12 |
| Good people are unlikely to get AIDS | -.21 | .22 |
| **Relative percentage of sample** | | |
| Highest canonical variate score on variate | 46% | 54% |
| Above mean on variate | 41% | 50% |

## Notes

[1] Dewey, of course, was not the first to recognize the role of activist groups in American democracy. Paisley (1981, p. 18) traced the recognition of that role to deTocqueville's visits to the Unites States in the 1820s when he wrote in *Democracy in America* that "Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations...If it he proposed to advance some truth, or to foster some feeling by the encouragement of a great example, they form a society."

[2] For further discussion of the role of publics in a theory of activist-group liberalism, see Grunig (1987).

[3] I have explained this theory in many books and articles, many of which are described in this paper. The most complete explanation of the theory can be found in Grunig and Hunt, 1984, pp. 138-162.

[4] In earlier research, I included a fourth variable, *prensence of a referent criterion*, in the theory. A referent criterion is essentially a cross-situational attitude, which almost automatically prescribes a solution for a particular issue to a person who holds it. Thus, I originally theorized that presence of a referent criterion would reduce the amount of communication behavior. However, research showed the referent criterion to be more of an effect of communication behavior than a cause, and I began to treat it as a dependent variable in the theory.

[5] Arcury and Johnson (1987) concluded that most Americans have a low level of environmental knowledge, based on a 1980 national sample and a 1985 Kentucky sample. These results suggest that in surveys that do not separate active, passive, and nonpublics the passive and nonpublics outnumber the active publics. Arcury and Johnson also found that education, income, and male sex--especially education--were the best indicators of knowledge about the environment--and, no doubt, of the active publics.

[6] See Grunig and Ipes (1983) for a more thorough discussion of the relationship of the situational theory to agenda setting.

[7] This explanation is consistent with what Petty and Cacioppo (1981, pp. 225-252) describe as the

"peripheral route" to attitude change, as compared with the "direct route."

[8] See Anderson (1987) for further application of Bandura's social learning theory to communication problems.

[9] The question that seems to measure individual constraint read: "To what extent do you believe AIDS is a problem that you can do little about?" The questions that seems to measure group efficacy read: "To what extent do you believe people like you could affect public policy toward AIDS if they wanted to?"

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# ACTIVISM IN THE NORTHWEST: SURVEYING THE EFFECTS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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## Purpose Of The Study

Earlier this year an expert on environmental public relations, E. Bruce Harrison, predicted that environmentalism would erupt once again into a major challenge for corporate communicators. He called the current period of relative quiet on the environmental front "the deceptive lull before the recurring storm" (1987, p. 4).

Despite this lack of attention to environmental issues on the part of many public relations practitioners, then, Harrison was warning that the nation continues to concern itself with acid rain, timber resources, groundwater pollution and nuclear energy. He concluded that the changing nature of activism may explain why so many public relations practitioners ignore the energy and environmental concerns of the citizenry.

Other articles in the trade press have described a similar "resurgence" of public interest in environmentalism since the environmental movement of the late 1960s. They, too, discuss the concomitant involvement by activist groups.

The survey data reported in this paper will go beyond the speculation and description that characterize former treatises to assess the current level and nature of environmental activism. The study should serve as a benchmark for scholars who are interested in charting the course of such activism and organizational responses to it in the coming decades. By analyzing correlates of success in organizational responses to activist pressure, it also should have implications for the public relations practitioners who must contend with environmentalism today.

## CONCEPTUALIZATION

### The Changing Nature of Environmental Activism

Harrison began to predict a resurgence of environmentalism five years ago. He reasoned that President Reagan's election put environmentalists out of government office and back into activist organizations. According to Harrison (1982a), the Reagan administration also was responsible for curtailing government regulation and encouraging energy development--both of which became targets for a new wave of environmentalists. He likened the environmental lobby to a "green giant"[1] gripping Congress and opposing business through powerful tactics that included campaigns waged through the mass media (Harrison, 1982b).

Two years later, an article in Business Week (1984) characterized the "new breed" of environmentalists as powerful because unlike their predecessors of the early 1970s, they formed coalitions. Such groups of environmental groups were successful in lobbying state and local governments to force businesses to clean up waste dumps, prevent toxic chemicals from contaminating water supplies and control pollution inside buildings.

Also in 1984, Kalikow contended that public participation in environmental disputes had increased. This involvement, while heralded by organizations such as the Sierra Club, was decried by critics who considered it a cop-out for federal agencies such as the EPA. They contended that activist organizations helping manage environmental and health hazards allow state and local control agencies to shirk their responsibilities and pass the regulatory buck.

That same year, an article in pr reporter (1984) contended that activists had become more powerful because, in essence, they had matured. Their ability to enlist grassroots support had become more effective than the days when enthusiasm--rather than sophistication--prevailed. In other words, they had gained from two decades of experience.

### The Changing Nature of Organizational Response

Just as the nature of activism was evolving over the last two decades, so was the way in which organizations responded to pressure from outside groups. Three main changes seem to characterize their reactions. First, they became more militant. Second, they relied more on public relations as a vital managerial function in helping resolve these environmental confrontations. And third, the public relations practiced in these instances became more strategic.

Judd (1984), in describing the new militancy, argued that target organizations formerly disposed to low profiles were increasingly adopting advocacy advertising and other proactive tactics to contend with activism. He reasoned that environmental groups had become more effective in influencing the political process. With this enhanced efficacy on the part of the pressure groups, corporations had no choice but to adopt similarly high-profile responses.

Guzzardi Jr., writing a year later, agreed that beleaguered companies showed a "growing tendency to fight back when they think the press got it wrong" (1985, p. 64). He further argued that any habitually silent corporations surely would lose the battle of public opinion when beset by environmental activists. He concluded, "A new willingness to defend the turf and a new desire to make the [media] serve corporate purposes point toward a policy of intelligent candor."

Proactive media relations, then, became an increasingly important tool in the corporate arsenal. Public relations professionals were the experts, so management was forced to consider them with renewed respect. Perhaps to their surprise, top managers discovered along the way that public relations practitioners could do more than churn out news releases and host press conferences. As veteran practitioner Stewart explained, "The activism and laws of the past couple of decades have made management accept communication more and more as a responsibility and an opportunity, as well as a vital management function" (Communication World, 1984, p. 18). Scholars Ryan and Martinson (1983) went further in explicating the changing role of public relations. Rather than a mouthpiece for management, it now served as corporate conscience.[3]

Managing issues and responding to external constituencies in a responsible way required more of public relations than the traditional journalistic or technical approach it had engaged in for most of the last century. By necessity, in the face of heightened activist pressure it became more strategic. According to Thomas (1985), turbulent times necessitated a concurrent shift from classic long-range planning to a more market-driven strategy flexible enough to change with the environment.

A front-page article in *pr reporter* (1985b) called this process "issue anticipation." Using General Dynamics as an example, it contended that the responsibility for identifying and dealing with issues that can become problems or even crises could lie with a multitude of organizational entities: board of directors, committee on corporate responsibility, *ad hoc* steering groups, attorneys, program directors and--of course--public relations practitioners. Harrison (1982b) pointed out, though, that the strategic management of issues has more to do with controlling the corporate response than it does with controlling the pressure brought to bear by environmentalists.

Dozier (1987) argued that environmental scanning or monitoring is one key way in which public relations practitioners can join the management team. Although public relations people as a whole are generally excluded from decision making (largely because they lack the data to contribute), this is more of a problem for women. Dozier found that men may be groomed for the managerial role but women must "earn" access by contributing special expertise through scientific scanning activities.

Unfortunately, scientific or even informal assessment of the environment requires a degree of professionalism uncharacteristic of many of today's practitioners (Schneider, aka Grunig, 1985, pp. 234-40).[3] Professionalism in public relations can be measured with three key variables: level of education, training in public relations and involvement in professional associations (belonging, attending meetings and holding office or planning programs). Together these attributes indicate a practitioner with the skills, experience and motivation necessary to conduct research.

Research is a necessary component of any environmental scanning program. As L. Grunig found (1986b), organizations must learn to measure their effectiveness in terms of more than simplistic, short-term gains or losses--such as whether a returnable-bottle bill is defeated. Instead, she suggested (1986b, p. 62) that public relations departments institute a continuous program of research:

> Organizations need more than piggyback questions to Roper polls to define and describe their publics. Counting clips gives minimal evidence of effectiveness. Any one-shot measures of the outcome of clashes between organization and activists are inadequate for program planning, proactive communication and issues management.

In another study of one case of crisis public relations, L. Grunig (1987, p. 17) concluded:

> All of this requires an expert in public relations practice--someone with the education and the experience to conduct the research and manage the program. Without such a professional, organizations are likely to continue to hire outside expertise--primarily attorneys. The management of communica-tion during industrial crises, therefore, represents both a challenge and an opportunity for individuals who value cooperation with the company's external constituencies.

## The Role of the Mass Media in Covering Activism

Little has been written that compares mass media coverage of activism today with that of twenty years ago. However, the role of the media has been studied empirically more than most other aspects of environmental activism and organizational response. The following is a brief review of major findings.

Wolfsfeld (1984), for example, explained the sensationalism[4] of the media by virtue of their focus on newsworthy events, rather than issues. This lecturer in communication and political science developed what he called "exchange theory," or the symbiosis between press and protest. According to Wolfsfeld, the relationship that develops between activists and reporters is one of mutual dependence, of overlapping purposes. Journalists and protest leaders share an interest in obtaining access to the other's resources. Activists need publicity. Reporters need news, especially news that is fast-breaking and of conflict (Sleeper, 1979).

Newsom (1983) found that small pressure groups are most effective in dealing with the media because of their flexibility and their diachronic style of communication. Media coverage of such small groups in particular is vital, according to Browne (1985), because it conveys legitimacy. Olien, Donohue and Tichenor (1984, p. 2) agreed, explaining that "investigators in 'agenda-setting' research have frequently concluded that media coverage of events creates citizen definition of the importance of those events." Further, Tuchman (1978, p. 134) discovered that as the group gains in legitimacy, it also gains more coverage because "news organizations coordinate their news nets with legitimated institutions."

At least one recent study showed that the more the media cover an issue, the more negative the public's opinion of the organization being pressured (Mazur, cited in pr reporter, 1986a).[5] The same study reported that media coverage of an issue increases during periods of activism. As Olien, Donohue and Tichenor (1984, p. 1) summarized, "Coverage of protest movements by the media, at different stages, may be vital to the level of public awareness and possible success or failure of a movement."

Although Gitlin (1980) has called the news media a potential "weapon of the disenfranchised," organizations often do enjoy one advantage over the environmental activist groups that pressure them: resources for rebuttal.[6] And, some activists contend that reporters are biased in favor of target organizations that are major advertisers (L. Grunig, 1986a, p. 50).

However, one recent in-depth study of 34 cases of activism found that coverage of activists and organizations in general is minimal. Local newspapers tend to cover activist-organization conflict more extensively than do larger urban or regional papers, though (L. Grunig, 1986a, pp. 50-51).

## The Changing Nature of Interaction Between Organizations and Activists

The relationship between environmental activists and public relations practitioners in the organizations they oppose has undergone what one political scientist has called a "profound transformation" over the last fifteen years. According to Gollner (1984), the typical relationship has gone from competitiveness to interdependence. For a person of Gollner's ideology, this in turn has meant the shift from activist threat to organizational opportunity. Mutual dependence, Gollner (1984, p. 2) said, has resulted from the organization's decision-making becoming more and more externally driven:

> Modern organizations are increasingly buffeted by the decisional waves of others. External issues will continue to crowd in upon traditional management domains. Socio-political forces will continue to exercise a powerful but no doubt different influence on economic matters. For these reasons, the leaders of our major institutions will have no choice but to become much more knowledgeable about the decision-making processes of those groups & organizations that bear significantly upon them.

At least one company in the petroleum industry seems to have seized this organizational opportunity. In 1980, Texaco institutionalized a program to systematically reach out to and work with third-party groups. Together, they attacked environmental issues of mutual concern. The program necessitated a new office of "constituency relations" within the company--and it was headed by the manager of the public relations and advertising department there. According to that manager (Pires, 1983 p. 16):

> the. . .function was situated deliberately in the Public Relations and Advertising Department, rather than in Government Relations, since its focus was to be the broad one of developing sound two-way communication with major national constituency groups, as opposed to only searching out legislative allies. From that communication, it was believed, selected public-issue support would follow in the long term. This premise has since been validated--and well beyond Texaco's most optimistic projections.

Indeed, three years later that same public relations manager--who had since started her own firm--described similar successes when other corporations sought mutually agreed upon solutions to issues with environmental groups (pr reporter, 1986b). Pires called the speed with which this type of constituency relations work developed "remarkable." She attributed the success of coalition-building for environmentalism at least partly to remaining flexible, being strategic, having a clear mandate from senior management, listening to all sides, exposing the activist groups to others in the organization, communicating extensively about the issue and sharing the decision process with all stakeholders.

An account manager for a large public relations firm in New York (quoted in pr reporter, 1985a) explained one practical advantage for the organization that adopts this approach to coping with environmentalism. Constituency building, in his opinion, is cheaper (and more effective) than advertising as a way to communicate with activists.

More fundamentally, this "new dialogue," according to Harrison (1986, p. 10) comes from the understanding that "we are in this together." Solving environmental problems, in his view, requires the give and take that coalitions of activists and organizations engender. He cited programs such as Clean Sites, Inc., as examples of cooperative action between conservationists and business that helped speed up toxic-dump cleanup. He considered such joint activity far more effective than the rhetoric of the past on the part of both environmentalists and organizational spokespeople.

Broader involvement and accord on environmental issues, of course, is of mutual interest to business and activist groups nationwide (Eason, 1983). Cooperation requires more than lip service, though, for any lasting positive effect. As Gwin Jr. put it (1984), board meetings, an 800 telephone number and occasional public hearings alone make little substantive change in the relationship between activist publics and managers in the organizations they pressure.

Some, of course, contend that clashes between activists and corporations are irreconcilable (Tesh, 1984). Experts on issue groups such as Tesh, though, also believe that joint deliberation over issues is a valuable exercise in any democracy. As Donaldson (1982, p. 165) said, "Laws never fit either individuals or corporations perfectly and will forever give rise to moral loopholes." Further, Drucker (1984) argued that this increasingly pluralistic society should expect a correspondingly growing number of such moral disputes. (This, according to Gorovitz [1985], is a cause of both "splendor and strife.")

One previous study has examined the nature of such environmental disputes from a public relations perspective. Last year, L. Grunig (1986b) analyzed in depth 16 instances of environmental activism from across the country. Based on these case studies, she found that activism represents a major problem for organizations. Both parties involved in the controversy feared that the other had the advantage in news coverage. In many instances, though, the organization tried to ignore all evidence of pressure from outside publics. When the public relations department did respond, it tended to practice either a manipulative two-way form of communication or a simplistic, one-way approach to information or publicity. In the end, no case represented a clear victory for the organization, especially since a resolution based on compromise was regarded as "losing" by organizational management. She concluded (1986b, pp. 57-58):

> Organizations need two-way communication to learn the consequences of what they are doing on all of their relevant publics. Organizations then need two-way communication to tell the publics what they are doing about any negative consequences. This study has shown that the adage "what they don't know won't hurt them" no longer works--if it ever did. Instead, the complexity of the environment of the 1980s dictates an equally comprehensive and dynamic public relations plan.

## Research Questions And Assumptions

The foregoing conceptualization suggests that together,environmental activists and organizations can work on the problems that government alone cannot or will not solve.[7] Articles in the trade and popular press also indicate that public relations practitioners play an increasingly important role in this process. Being effective requires a degree of professionalism and an appreciation for two-way, balanced communication uncharacteristic of most public relations in the past. In other words, public relations practitioners must go beyond their traditional role of media relations and work with others in the organization to execute a responsible, well researched, strategic plan for communicating with external constituencies.

Because most literature cited above does not come from the scholarly journals, it lacks the theoretical framework that would lead to hypotheses.

Instead, it provides a rich descriptive base that suggests the following questions and assumptions.

How extensive is environmental activism in this country? How successful is the typical activist group in achieving its goals? How successful is the organization in dealing with the group? What are the correlates of success in each case?

Factors that presumably affect the success of an environmental pressure group include its size, resources (both in terms of money and leadership skill), independence or involvement in a coalition of groups, tactics, strategy and media coverage. Variables that seem to affect success on the part of the organization include the anticipation of issues; cooperation among public relations practitioners, other organizational members and the activists themselves in dealing with the controversy; level of responsibility; development of strategic plans and programs; public awareness of the dispute; media coverage; evaluation of effectiveness; type and size of organization; size and budget of the public relations department (including reliance on consultants or public relations firms); and demographics and professionalism of the public relations staff.

## Method

A telephone survey of a sample of 200 organizations in the Pacific Northwest was conducted to answer the questions and support or disconfirm the assumptions listed above. Interviews were directed to the respondent in charge of public relations from each organization. In the case of organizations with no formal public relations department or officer, questions were addressed to the person who typically deals with any activist pressure.

Cost dictated that calls take place within the state of Washington.[8] However, corporations on the border cities of Vancouver and Spokane often do business in the adjoining states of Oregon and Idaho, respectively, as well. Also, many of the associations headquartered in Washington are of regional or national (even international) scope.[9] Therefore, findings pertain at least to the entire Northwest region. Implications should be generalizable across the country.

Sampling frames included the Washington section of Standard & Poor's Register of Corporations, *Directors and Executives*; the Washington section of the *Encyclopedia of Associations*; and Washington's *SCAN* (State Controlled Area Network) *Telephone Directory*.[10] A stratified random sample was drawn from each frame, resulting in what appears to be an over-representation of governmental agencies: 100 corporations, 76 government offices and 24 associations. However, since government is involved in environmentalism in two ways, this overemphasis on Olympia seems appropriate. First, activists often pressure the government to impose regulation on offending organizations. Then too, the target of much environmentalism in this country is the government itself--public agencies such as departments of transportation, ecology or energy (L. Grunig, 1986b, p. 14).

Pretests with ten respondents from organizations similar to the sample (five in corporations, three in government and two in associations) cleared up any ambiguities in the initial eight-page questionnaire. Interestingly, pretesting also resulted in one key question becoming more--rather than less--vague. Defining "activist group" in the filter question too narrowly made respondents unsure of whether the pressure they had experienced "qualified" as activism. So, interviewers offered a broad definition that could apply to any advocacy, pressure, special interest or issue group. This definition, taken largely from the work of Mintzberg (1983, pp. 45-49), considers an activist group to be an organized external public, group or coalition that forms around an issue or turns its attention to a new issue. Its processes may be formal or informal, episodic or regular, but its purpose is to exert control over the organization as a group of outsiders.

Interviews lasted between eight and 50 minutes, depending on whether the filter question about experiencing activism was answered affirmatively. If not, then only questions pertaining to the organization itself and its public relations department were included.

Length of the entire questionnaire created a problem that was not obvious from the pretests, all of which were completed. Only 165 of the 200 interviews were deemed usable. Many respondents who indicated initially that their organization had experienced activist pressure discontinued the interview prematurely because they were interrupted or for some other reason.

Richness of the data that resulted from the completed questionnaires, though, justifies the ensuing analysis. Responses of the 26 open-ended questions, in particular, flesh out the understanding of environmentalism in this country today.[11] Although working from a structured interview schedule, trained interviewers[12] probed for respondents' hunches, motivations, explanations, etc. The disadvantage of time required to collect and to analyze data of this sort is offset by the advantage of the fullness of information gleaned--especially important in an initial, broadbrush study such as this.

Two coders independent of the interviewers placed responses to the open-ended questions into the categories necessary for subsequent computer analysis. In only three of those 26 questions was the intercoder reliability[13] less than 90 to 99 percent.[14] They involved the types of contact respondents engaged in with the media (83% agreement), the way in which organizations responded to a recent instance of activist pressure (80%) and product line or service of the sampled organization (79%).

Computer analysis initially led to a description of the typical activist group and the organizations sampled (including their public relations departments), the ways in which those organizations tend to respond to activism and their perceptions of media involvement. Following these descriptive data, correlational analysis and discriminant analysis were used to identify variables associated with success of the activist group or success of the organization.

## Findings

### Extent and Nature of Activism

Forty percent of the sample had experienced the pressure of activism. Of those 66 organizations, more than half (35, or 54%) felt the pressure "almost continually" over the years. The remaining 30 organizations were almost equally divided between the responses "sometimes" and "rarely."[15]

The actual incidence of activism undoubtedly is higher than these figures establish. Almost all of the 35 uncompleted interviews involved cases of organizational pressure by external groups.[16] If these cases had been included in the total sample, the level of activism would approach 50 percent.

Respondents described the success of the activist group in a recent instance on a scale ranging from "highly successful" (5) to "highly unsuccessful" (1). Mean score was 3.29, or between "somewhat successful" and "neither successful nor unsuccessful."[17] Ten respondents or 16 percent, however, considered the activist group to have been highly successful. Only six (9%) considered the group highly unsuccessful.

Half of the activist groups were local chapters of a state or national organization. Half also were part of a coalition of other activist groups.[18] More than half (55%) were aiming their efforts at organizations in addition to the one sampled.[19] Table 1 shows the frequency of tactics employed by activist groups.

Table 1

Tactics Used by Activist Groups

| Tactic | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Letter-writing campaigns | 35 |
| Media publicity, including news releases & interviews | 31 |
| Lobbying | 24 |
| Petitions | 19 |
| Telephone campaigns | 18 |
| Marching, picketing or sitting in | 13 |
| Newsletters | 6 |
| Boycotting | 5 |
| Meetings | 5 |
| Violent actions, such as bombings or assassinations | 4 |
| Personal visits to the organization | 3 |
| Lawsuits | 3 |
| Fund-raising, forming liaison committees, strikes, testifying at hearings, soapbox speeches | 1 each |

More than a third of the respondents did not know how the activist group was funded. Of those who did, 13 cited donations and 15 said membership fees. Nine activist groups were understood to be funded through a combination of these and other sources, including fundraisers and even corporate donations. One mentioned blackmail; one group was not funded at all.

Seventeen percent of the respondents did not know who the leader of the group was. Almost half of the known leaders, though, were not prominent in the area. Twenty-four of the leaders, or 37 percent, were well-known at least locally.

Somewhat surprisingly, almost 60 percent of respondents did not consider the actions of the pressure group "hostile."[20] Instead, they characterized their posture as "adversarial" (21%); concerned" (18%); "inquisitive" (12%); or "civil," "set in their ways or adamant" or "pressuring" (9% each). Other responses given less often include "helpful and supportive," "threatening" and "accusatory."

## Role of the Mass Media

When asked about how much the mass media influence the way the organization is perceived by activist groups, 28 respondents or 43 percent said "a great deal." Twenty-one, or 32 percent, said "some" and the remaining 13 or 20 percent answered "very little." In a related question about how much the media affect the way in which organizational management perceives the activist groups pressuring it, only 11 (17%) responded "a great deal." On the other hand, almost half said top management is affected "very little" by press coverage of the activist group. The remaining 29 percent answered "some."

Almost two-thirds of the sample thought that the media understand "quite well" their ability to influence organizations positively or negatively when covering activism. Less than 10 percent answered that the media understand this power "not very well" and 14, or 22 percent, thought that the media understand it "somewhat." Four respondents "didn't know."

More than half (55%) believed that the media intentionally use their ability to influence the public's viewpoints toward the organization. Nearly a third disagreed and the remaining respondents didn't know. A related question asked whether the media intentionally use their ability to influence public viewpoints toward activist groups. Results were essentially the same: almost half (48%) said "yes," about a third said "no" and the other 19 percent didn't know.

Twice as many respondents consider it unethical as ethical for the media to try to influence public opinion toward either an activist group or an organization. Five percent, though, volunteered that "it depends on the issue." One person, for example, said, "Yes, it's ethical if the group is something like the NeoNazis." Another contended that this is ethical only if attempts to influence are confined to the editorial page.

Surprisingly, four out of five respondents said they think their organization has been treated fairly in press coverage of its dealings with activist groups. (One of the 12 interviewees who did not added, however, that coverage was "getting better.") This proportion rose to 92 percent who agreed that the activist group had been treated fairly by the media.[21]

Sixty-two percent of the interviewees acknowledged that they had tried to use the media to promote their organization's position in a situation where they faced activist pressure. Thirty-eight percent said they had not. Several of those 24 respondents explained, though, that they felt the need to understand the media better and to counsel management about its potential. Some also indicated a need to integrate media relations into an ongoing program of public relations, rather than resorting to contact with reporters only in response to crises.

That media contact took several forms: primarily direct interaction with journalists (50%), news releases (28%), press conferences (13%). Only one respondent alluded to writing a letter to the editor. Other types of interaction included talk shows and producing educational videotapes for local stations. Half of all respondents indicated that local media only covered their organization's involvement with pressure groups. Fewer controversies were covered in state-wide media and fewer still in national, international or specialized media.

Almost half of all respondents (28, or 45%) would have preferred less, rather than more, press coverage of their interaction with activist groups. One typical explanation was that "the media have a tendency to inflame issues that shouldn't be big; and once they get in the paper, you have a major issue on your hands no matter what you started with." Respondents were almost equally divided between wanting more coverage (15, or 24%)[31] and about the same amount (17, or 27%).

Most respondents (46%) first tended to find out about activist pressure on their organization from the pressure group itself. Others in the organization were the second-most-typical source of this information (19%), followed by the media (14%), a combination of sources (18%) and--to a much lesser degree--electronic data bases and "constantly monitoring the field."

## Organizational Responses

Answers varied widely to the question of who within the organization is responsible for dealing with activist groups.

Fifteen people gave each of the following responses: the person in charge of public relations, top management and the project director whose program is involved in the dispute. Nine respondents cited only the CEO; and the remaining respondents alluded to "everyone in the organization." Slightly more than half understood that the entire organization--upper management and employees--was involved with the response to the activist group. The proportion of organizations with a standing committee to deal with such issues was surprisingly high--30 percent, as opposed to 70 percent with no such committee.

Less than one third of the sample reported that its organizations had researched the activist group extensively. Of the 20 respondents who had, methods of research included informal investigation (9), multiple means (4), talking with people whom they considered similar to members of the activist group (3), scientific surveys (3), asking the environmentalists to tell about themselves (1) and library investigation (1).

The mean score of level of responsibility to the activist group was 3.35, on a scale ranging from "very responsible" (5) to "very irresponsible" (1). Fifty-five percent considered their action "very responsible"; only one answered "very irresponsible."

Forty respondents (63%) said their organization failed to develop a special program to deal with the activist group. For the 24 who did, approaches included meetings with the group (5); mediation committees, ongoing campaigns and training staff in how to respond (3 each); and public meetings, hiring a PR firm or a labor negotiator, conducting seminars, advertising, direct mail and adding a member of the group to the board of directors (1 each).[13]

Responses were almost split between those who said the activists have direct involvement in planning the response (29) and those who said no (31). Typical ways of involving the external groups included meetings (10); co-opting through committees, task forces and other decision-making bodies (7); one-on-one discussion (5); and joint research (1).

A majority of respondents thought that the general public was aware of the activism their organization faced. That awareness affected the organization's response in 41 percent of the cases. When the organization perceived that the public knew about the controversy, it tended to respond faster and, at times, to hold public hearings, to engage in more advertising, to provide more information and--in one case--to change its policy.

Aside from formal programs developed to cope with activism, organizations tended to respond to pressure groups in the following ways: listening and then providing information (17); holding meetings (8); and developing proactive persuasive campaigns (6). Less common approaches included compromising, complying with environmentalists' demands or wants, helping the activists meet their goals and ignoring them.

Slightly more than half of the sample (53%) evaluated these kinds of responses. Using a clipping service was the most common method. Other evaluative tools included--in order of frequency mentioned--interviewing members of the activist group informally, internal discussion with top management, interviewing members of the general public informally, conducting formal surveys, reviewing correspondence, debriefing of the team charged with dealing with the activists and "word of mouth" within the community.

Forty-seven percent of the sample did not evaluate their response to the activist pressure. However, 43 interviewees or 68 percent deemed their response successful. Ten, or 16 percent, did not. Five said they didn't know yet since the matter was unresolved; another five considered their response at least partially successful.

Evidence of success included the maintenance or achievement of organizational goals (10), resolution of the issue (8), expression of satisfaction from the activist group (7), compromise (7) and a good feeling (intuitive) about having been truthful and open in dealing with the activists (7).[24] Cited far less often were favorable media coverage, having helped the group, bringing out important information and the fact that the dispute could have gotten worse.

Evidence of lack of success included the fact that the group was still pressuring the organization (4), losing in court (2) and passage of legislation unfavorable to the organization (2).

## The Organization and Its Public Relations Department

Coders disagreed 21 percent of the time on how to place the organization's main product line or service into a workable group of categories. However, Table 2 does help to describe types of organizations sampled:

Table 2

Types of Organizations Sampled

| Main Product Line or Service | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Government agency | 59 |
| Consumer services/commercial (including banking, real estate, hotel and restaurant and utilities) | 48 |
| Manufacturing | 20 |
| Retail and distributing | 17 |
| Professional (including education, publishing, religion, health and medical and other professional services) | 9 |
| Wholesale | 6 |
| Other associations | 6 |

Sixty organizations, or 38 percent, lacked a board of directors. Size of the organization ranged from six to more than 10,000 employees. Most were very small: 84 respondents, or 54 percent, worked with fewer than 100 other employees. A third came from small- to medium-sized organizations, those with 100 to 1,000 employees. Only four worked in companies with more than 10,000 employees.

Most public relations departments were correspondingly small: departments with fewer than five on the PR staff were typical of 99 respondents, or 72 percent. Another 18 employed between five and ten in that department; six organizations had departments with 11 to 15 employees in public relations; two had between 16 and 20; and, somewhat surprisingly, 12 employed more than 20 people in public relations. Twenty-eight organizations sampled had no public relations, public affairs or public information department at all.[25]

Of those that did, the head of the PR department reported most often to the CEO, followed by a vice president who was not in public relations, a program director or manager other than in public relations and--in a mere 3 percent of the sample--to the chairman of the board.

Budgets for the public relations department ranged from no money (in 28 cases, or 19%) to about $800,000 (four cases, or 3%). One respondent explained that the budget varied widely from year to year; seven did not answer this question because of confidentiality; and 29, or a fifth of the sample, said they did not know. Small budgets--under $5,000--were the most common (20%), followed by $80,000-350,000 (7%), $5,000-$80,000 (5%) and $350,000-800,000 (3%).

Only 25 respondents, or 18 percent, regularly allocated money for outside help in public relations. Budgets for retaining public relations firms or consultants ranged from under $500 (35%) to more than $25,000 (13%). Very small budgets for outside expertise were the rule.

Respondents were asked to indicate how often they conduct certain activities typical of public relations.[26] Possibilities ranged from "often" (4) to "never" (1). Table 3 shows the relative frequencies of their answers. The higher the mean score, the more often interviewees engaged in the activity listed.

Results indicate that research-related activity is least common among survey respondents. Informal contact with the public, journalists, legislators and other opinion leaders is most common.

Factor analysis reduced the 16 activities to a more manageable group of three categories for ensuing correlational analysis. Of the three factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1.0, the conventional criterion for determining the number of factors, the first explains 43 percent of the variance. Variables that load high on this factor, labeled "managerial,"[37] are:

Table 3

Public Relations Activities

| Activity | Mean Score |
|---|---|
| Writing press releases[28] | 2.65 |
| Conducting scientifically designed surveys of the public or employees before beginning a project | 1.91 |
| Conducting informal or qualitative research of the public or employees before a project | 2.27 |
| Conducting scientifically designed surveys in order to evaluate the results of a project | 1.93 |
| Conducting informal or qualitative research in order to evaluate the results of a project | 2.27 |
| Preparing house organs, magazines, newsletters or other publications | 2.71 |
| Making informal contacts with journalists | 2.57 |
| Holding press conferences and making formal contact with reporters and editors | 2.09 |
| Making informal contact with the public | 2.99 |
| Making contact with "thought leaders" | 2.67 |
| Staging events, tours, open houses | 2.25 |
| Preparing tapes, films and audiovisual materials | 2.11 |
| Preparing institutional advertisements[29] | 2.13 |
| Counseling management or administrators on public opinion toward your organization | 2.57 |
| Contacting governmental officials | 2.98 |
| Writing speeches | 2.34 |

contact with thought leaders (.80), contact with governmental officials (.69), informal contact with journalists (.69), writing speeches (.69), contact with the public (.69), writing press releases (.63), counseling management (.57) and conducting informal research to evaluate programs (.32).

The second, or "journalistic" factor, explains 12 percent of the variance. Factors that load high on it are: preparing tapes, films and other AV materials (.75); preparing institutional ads (.72); staging special events (.68); writing house organs and other internal publications (.63); informal contact with journalists (.56); writing press releases (.56); holding press conferences (.48); and counseling management (.37).

The third, or "research" factor, explains 9 percent of the variance. All four research-related activities load high on it: scientific evaluation of programs (.85), scientific surveys before beginning a project (.81), informal research before beginning a project (.77) and informal evaluation of programs (.75). The two other variables that load high on this factor are preparing audiovisual materials (.38) and writing speeches (.30).

## Public Relations Personnel

"Public relations manager" or "director" was only the second most common title for interviewees (13%). "Manager" of a department other than PR was most typical (19%). Other titles, in order of frequency, were program director or assistant director (13%), staff member in public relations, public information, public affairs or corporate communication (13%); vice president (not of public relations) (9%); manager of sales, marketing or advertising (9%); general staff (8%); personnel staff (6%); president or CEO (5%); and executive or administrative secretary (5%).

Most interviewees were inexperienced in the field of public relations: 41 percent had worked in PR for two years or less. (Twenty-two percent of the sample, of course, were not in public relations at all.) Remaining respondents were almost evenly divided among the three remaining ranges of work experience: 3-6 years, 19%; 7-10 years, 18%; and more than 10 years, 23%. Findings for experience with the current employer were similar: two years or less, 25%; 3-6 years, 30%; 7-10 years, 18%; and more than 10 years, 27%.

Most interviewees had at least an undergraduate college degree (65, or 43% with a bachelor's degree; 34, or 22% with a master's degree; and 4, or 3%, with a doctorate). About one-fourth had at least some college or technical school. The remaining 8 percent had a high school diploma or less.

Formal training in public relations was the exception rather than the rule. Most respondents (56%) had none. Almost a third, though, had had some courses or seminars in public relations. Eight percent had a bachelor's degree in public relations and 3 percent had a graduate degree in the field.

Belonging to a professional association in public relations, too, was exceptional. Nine percent of the sample listed membership in the Public Relations Society of America; 4 percent in the International Association of Business Communicators; and an even smaller proportion in others such as Women in Communications, SDX/SPJ, Capitol City Press Club and CASE.

Of those who belong to any of these associations, 42 percent attended meetings "regularly," 36 percent "sometimes" and 21 percent "rarely." Slightly more than half had held office or helped plan programs.

The previous four variables--training in public relations, belonging to a PR association, attending its meetings and holding office or planning programs--were scaled to form an index of professionalism used in subsequent correlational analyses.

The mid-age ranges characterized most respondents: 55, or 35 percent, were between 31 and 40; 45, or 29 percent, were between 41 and 50. Twenty-seven respondents, or 17 percent, were under 30; 25, or 16 percent, were between 51 and 60; and 4, or 3 percent, were over 60. (Nine respondents declined to give their age.) Two-thirds of the interviewees were men.

## Correlates of Success for Activist Groups

Nonparametric correlational analysis, shown in Table 4, exposes few statistically significant relationships between perceived success of the activist group and factors suggested by the review of literature. Predictably, however, the association between success of the activist group and success of the organization it opposed is negative and approaches significance (-.15, $p<.11$).

More than half of the tactics used by activists correlated significantly (at least at the .10 level) with their success: telephone campaigns (.15, $p<.09$), lobbying (.21, $p<.03$), boycotting (.14, $p<.12$), violent actions (.21, $p<.04$) and letter-writing campaigns (-.12, $p<.14$). Only the latter is a negative association, indicating that letter-writing is the least effective technique for activists to adopt.

Table 4

Correlations of Activist Success with Predictor Variables

| | |
|---|---|
| Activist group is part of a national organization | .04 |
| Activist group is part of a coalition of other groups | .12 |
| Number of groups in the coalition | .02 |
| Tactics: | |
| Petitions | .07 |
| Letter-writing campaign | -.12* |
| Phone-calling campaign | .15* |
| Lobbying | .21** |
| Media publicity | .05 |
| Marching, picketing or sitting in | .04 |
| Boycotting | .14* |
| Violence | .21** |
| Funding | .07 |
| Donations | -.03 |
| Membership fees | .00 |
| Group has a prominent leader | -.10 |
| Group's actions hostile | .09 |
| Organization has a standing committee for such issues | -.13* |
| Entire organization gets involved | -.00 |
| Organization researches the group extensively | -.04 |
| Level of responsibility to the group | .00 |
| Special program developed to deal with the group | -.05 |
| Group directly involved in planning response to it | -.01 |
| General public is aware of the activism | .04 |
| Media's influence on activists' perception of the org. | .11 |
| Media's influence on org.'s perception of activists | .23** |
| Public awareness affects the organization's response | .21** |
| The organization's response is successful | -.15* |
| Organization has a board of directors | -.25*** |
| Size of the organization | -.11* |
| Size of the PR department | -.09 |
| Size of the PR budget | -.24*** |
| Regular budget allocation for outside expertise in PR | -.15* |
| Size of the allocation for outside expertise in PR | -.02 |
| Managerial activity factor | -.06 |
| Journalistic activity factor | .07 |
| Research activity factor | .05 |
| Professionalism of the public relations practitioner | -.03 |
| Experience in public relations | .03 |
| Experience with current employer | -.21** |
| Level of education | .11 |
| Training in public relations | .04 |
| Age | -.01 |
| Gender | .09 |

***$p<.01$
**$p<.05$
*$p<.10$

On the other hand, public awareness of the dispute acts in the group's favor. Further, the more the media have affected the way in which organizational management perceives the activist group, the greater the likelihood of the group's success.

Surprisingly, other factors thought to influence the group's effectiveness did not seem to matter. They include the group's involvement with a larger group or coalition of groups, the nature of its leader and its funding, hostility of its approach to the target organization and its reliance on the mass media.

Several characteristics of the target organization do seem to affect the group's chances of success. Activists are less likely to be successful when their target organization has a standing committee dedicated to dealing with opposition groups and when it has a board of directors. The larger the organization and the greater its investment in public relations, the less successful the pressure group opposing it. Another significant and negative correlation exists between organizational longevity of the public relations employee and the activists' success.

Other aspects of the organization and its public relations efforts that were assumed to be significant predictors of the success or failure of activist groups seem to make little, if any difference. These variables include involvement of the whole organization, developing special programs to cope with activism, size of the public relations department, orientation of the PR practitioner (managerial versus the traditionally journalistic), reliance on research, professionalism and the key demographic factors of experience in the field, level of education and sex.

Table 5 shows a cross tabulation of perceived success of the environmental group with the type of organization. Because of the zeros in three cells of the matrix and the small numbers in most other cells, the chi square value would be meaningless. However, this comparison makes obvious the difference between activists' success in dealing with commercial enterprises such as construction companies, utilities and resorts and their comparative lack of success in conflicts with the government.

Table 5

Comparison of Type of Organization by Activists' Success

| Organization Type | | Unsuccessful | | Successful | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | | % | N | % |
| Governmental agency | 29 | 15 | 52 | 14 | 48 |
| Consumer services, commercial | 15 | 5 | 33 | 10 | 67 |
| Manufacturing | 4 | 2 | 50 | 2 | 50 |
| Retail & distributing | 4 | 1 | 25 | 3 | 75 |
| Wholesale | 2 | 0 | 00 | 2 | 100 |
| Association | 1 | 0 | 00 | 1 | 100 |
| Professional services | 4 | 0 | 00 | 4 | 100 |

In Table 6, the same types of organizations are cross tabulated with incidence of activism, to see if certain organizations are more prone to pressure from outside groups. Results of the previous cross tabulation indicated that the difference between government and consumer service organizations might be significant. The small numbers of other types of organizations further suggested that these remaining five categories could logically be regrouped together, making the measure of statistical significance meaningful.

Table 6

Comparison of Organizational Type with Incidence of Activism

| Organization Type | | Activism | | No Activism | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | | % | N | % |
| Governmental agency | 59 | 32 | 54 | 27 | 46 |
| Consumer services, commercial | 43 | 17 | 40 | 26 | 60 |
| All other types | 58 | 15 | 26 | 43 | 74 |

*Chi square* = 9.82, 2 *df*, *p*<.007

Table 6 shows that government offices are considerably more likely than other types of organizations to experience activist pressure. In fact, more state, local and regional agencies do than do not find themselves embroiled in environmental disputes. Although pressured to a lesser extent than government, consumer service organizations do tend to be opposed by activists to a significantly greater degree than do other types of organizations.

## Correlates of Success for Organizations

This section of the findings will discuss the variables that seem to influence success on the part of target organizations, rather than the environmentalists who fight them. Table 7 reports these nonparametric correlations.

The most striking correlation occurs between organizational success and the organization's level of responsibility to the activists (.49, $p<.001$). Researching the environmentalists also correlates significantly and positively with organizational success (.23, $p<.05$), as does having a board of directors (.38, $p<.05$) and--to a lesser extent--involving the activist group in planning a response (.21, $p<.10$).

Table 7 also indicates that the less hostile the posture of the activist group, the more successful the organization tends to be (-.22 $p<.05$). However, when the group boycotts, marches, pickets or sits in, chances for organizational success decrease significantly.

A small but significant relationship exists between organizational size and success in coping with environmentalism. To some extent, the more employees, the more successful the organization (.18, $p<1.0$). If respondents were veterans of their organization and if they practiced the traditionally journalistic approach to communication (writing press releases, hosting press conferences, staging pseudoevents, etc.), chances were better that the organization would prevail.

The most unexpected finding in Table 7 is that professionalism of the public relations practitioner and even experience in the field correlate significantly with lack of success for the organization.

## Table 7

### Correlations of Organizational Success with Predictor Variables

| | |
|---|---|
| Activist group is part of a national organization | .14 |
| Activist group is part of a coalition of other groups | .18 |
| Number of groups in the coalition | .10 |
| Tactics: | |
| Petitions | -.34 |
| Letter-writing campaign | -.01 |
| Phone-calling campaign | -.02 |
| Lobbying | -.04 |
| Media publicity | -.16 |
| Marching, picketing or sitting in | -.34*** |
| Boycotting | -.41**** |
| Violence | -.04 |
| Funding | -.10 |
| Donations | .11 |
| Membership fees | .03 |
| Group has a prominent leader | -.06 |
| Group's actions hostile | -.22** |
| Organization has a standing committee for such issues | .10 |
| Entire organization gets involved | .10 |
| Organization researches the group extensively | .23** |
| Level of responsibility to the group | .49**** |
| Special program developed to deal with the group | -.08 |
| Group directly involved in planning response to it | .21* |
| General public is aware of the activism | -.12 |
| Media's influence on activists' perception of the org. | -.04 |
| Media's influence on org.'s perception of activists | .13 |
| Public awareness affects the organization's response | -.10 |
| The activist group is successful | -.15* |
| Organization has a board of directors | .38** |
| Size of the organization | .18* |
| Size of the PR department | .38 |
| Size of the PR budget | -.05 |
| Regular budget allocation for outside expertise in PR | .03 |
| Size of the allocation for outside expertise in PR | -.06 |
| Managerial activity factor | -.07 |
| Journalistic activity factor | .17* |
| Research activity factor | .10 |
| Professionalism of the public relations practitioner | -.19** |
| Experience in public relations | -.03 |
| Experience with current employer | .14* |
| Level of education | -.01 |
| Training in public relations | -.02 |
| Age | -.01 |
| Gender | .06 |

****$p<.001$
***$p<.01$
**$p<.05$
*$p<.10$

Cross tabulating organizational success with type of organization results in the gloomiest picture to date for organizations facing environmental pressure. Table 8 shows that respondents in every governmental agency, for example, considered themselves unsuccessful in dealing with activists. The small number of cases in the remaining cells precludes generalizations and even assumptions of significant differences; but the figures do indicate that nearly half of the commercial enterprises, at least, considered themselves successful.

Table 8

Comparison of Type of Organization by Organization's Success

| Organization Type | | Unsuccessful | | Successful | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | | % | N | % |
| Governmental agency | 28 | | 100 | 0 | 00 |
| Consumer services, commercial | 13 | 9 | 69 | 4 | 31 |
| Manufacturing | 3 | 1 | 33 | 2 | 67 |
| Retail & distributing | 3 | 1 | 33 | 2 | 67 |
| Wholesale | 2 | | 100 | 0 | 00 |
| Professional services | 4 | 2 | 50 | 2 | 50 |

One interesting and unexpected finding is that although only about half of all respondents from government said that activists were successful in their dispute with the agency, not one representative of a government agency considered his or her own office to have been successful in that same situation.

## Making Sense of All Predictor Variables

Discriminant analysis was undertaken as a first step toward theory building in what has been, so far, a descriptive study. Predicted variables were both success of the activist group and success of the organization. Choosing predictor variables, however, was problematic. Preliminary correlations should have indicated those factors most likely to lead to success of one or the other party in an environmental confrontation. However, correlations are, for the most part, small. Also, the extensive conceptualization included here suggests certain influences that should not be disregarded on the basis of correlational analysis alone.

Determination of variables to include in the discriminant analysis, then, was made on two bases: size of the correlations and as indicated by the literature (scale of professionalism). In the case of success by activists, correlations greater than .15 were used; for organizational success, where correlations in general were larger, .20 was the cutoff point.

In the first analysis, of success by activist groups, functions successfully placed 80 percent of the respondents into the correct category, unsuccessful or successful. Centroids for the former are -1.07 and for the latter, .65.

Table 9 shows that contending with a seasoned veteran from the organization is the best predictor of lack of success for environmentalists. The longer that person has been with the organization, whether he or she is in public relations or not, the less successful the activist group will be. On the other hand, the more the media have affected the way the organization perceives it, the more successful the group will be. The organization's having a board of directors, regularly budgeting for outside expertise in public relations and having a sizeable budget for that internal department all affect the potential success of the activists negatively. Two tactics, in particular, are positive factors for the pressure group: lobbying and, to a lesser extent, resorting to violence. Professionalism of the public relations respondent discriminates least well among all predictor variables.

In the second analysis, success of the organization, functions successfully placed 86 percent of the respondents into the correct category, unsuccessful and successful. Centroids for the former are -1.93 and for the latter, .53.

## Table 9

## Discriminant Analysis of Success by Activist Groups

| Standardized Coefficients of Discriminating Variables | |
|---|---|
| PR person's years with current employer | -.50 |
| How much the media have affected how the organization perceives the activists | .36 |
| The organization's having a board of directors | -.33 |
| Lobbying | .32 |
| The organization allocates $ for PR consultants | -.28 |
| Size of the organization's PR budget | -.28 |
| Violent action | .10 |
| Professionalism of the PR practitioner | -.04 |

Table 10 shows that level of responsibility toward the activist group is the strongest predictor of organizational success. However, visible protest activities on the part of the environmentalists are almost equally strong determinants of lack of success for their target organizations. To a lesser extent, having a board of directors, involving activists in organizational responses and studying them extensively all lead to success. The more hostile the activist group, though, the less likely the organization will be successful. Finally, although the correlation between professionalism and organizational success is low, it is negative--meaning that the more professional the public relations person in charge of dealing with activists, the less likely the organization will succeed.

## Conclusions

The primary assumption of this study, that environmentalism represents a significant challenge for organizations in the 1980s, was supported by the findings. Survey results indicated that nearly half of all organizations suffer the threat of external opposition. Not all types of organizations, though, are equally vulnerable: not only is government a more frequent target than industry or non-profits, but interactions between public agencies and activist groups tend to be less successful for the target organization.

Table 10

Discriminant Analysis of Organizational Success

| Standardized Coefficients of Discriminating Variables | |
|---|---|
| Responsibility to the activist group | .49 |
| Group's marching, picketing, or sitting in | -.47 |
| Group's boycotting | -.45 |
| Having a board of directors | .41 |
| Hostility on the part of the activists | .35 |
| Involving activists in planning a response | .25 |
| Researching the activists extensively | .22 |
| Professionalism | -.08 |

Across organizations, though, pressure groups prevail more often than they lose in environmental disputes. Further, environmentalism dominates as the concern of activists in general. Not all controversies, of course, take on a hostile tone. In fact, more often than not organizational spokespeople describe their adversaries' stance as just that: adversarial, probing, firm, etc.

Activists' tactics range from the innocuousness of direct mail campaigns to the violence of dynamiting power lines. Fortunately, milder forms of pressure predominate. Certain tactics are more successful for the environmental groups than others, though, especially lobbying, boycotting and--in the rare instances when it happens--violence. In essence, most visible tactics are more efficacious than the _sub rosa_ approach inherent in telephoning, writing or circulating petitions.

Organizations adopt a variety of approaches to countering this external opposition. Predictably, research--although rarely accomplished--is an effective tool. Loyalty of the employees is a second important factor in organizational success. Curiously, having a board of directors figures prominently in that success. One possible explanation is that having a board offers the opportunity to co-opt opponents by placing them in that decision-making group--a favored tactic of several respondents. All organizations are most successful when they treat their adversaries responsibly.

Analyzing findings related to the role of the mass media presents a mixed picture of their perceived power and intent. In general, respondents credit the press with the ability to influence their organizations, activists and the public significantly. Further, they agree that the media are aware of their potential power and--in fact--deliberately exert influence through their coverage of activism. Predictably, most interviewees consider this practice unethical, although a sizeable percentage espoused a situational approach to the "gray" areas. A related and unexpected finding is that the majority of respondents consider their treatment in the print and broadcast media to have been fair (but not so fair, of course, as treatment of the environmentalists!). And, despite interviewees' emphasis on media relations, almost half would have preferred less--rather than more--media coverage.

Public relations people are charged with handling activist opposition in approximately equal numbers as are project directors and other top managers of the organization. Some organizations, of course, lack any formal public relations department. Spending money on public relations, though (whether in a departmental budget or for hiring PR firms), enhances the organization's chances of prevailing in its dealing with environmentalists. Large organizations, too, have the advantage when coping with environmentalism.

The disappointing finding that professionalism of the public relations staff does not help predict success for the organization might be explained as follows. Professional, rather than careerist, practitioners espouse the values of their colleagues in the profession--rather than the company line. That means they are may be more wedded to the notion of two-way, balanced communication with the goal of cooperation or understanding between organization and activists than they are to the goal of organizational domination.

This study is perhaps as important for what it did not as for what it did uncover. For example, the way in which a person practices public relations (whether managerially or journalistically) has little obvious effect on the outcome of interaction with environmentalists. The number of people working in the public relations department, too, has little impact. Although about half of the activist groups described were part of a group of groups, this affiliation affected the outcome very little.

Further, media coverage is incidental to other, more important factors--such as involving the activist group in the programs that the organization develops to deal with the issue and the pressure tactics the group adopts.

## Implications

Despite the obvious problems facing corporate and government communicators in the form of environmental activism today, this study suggests ways in which the goals of the organization can be balanced with the intent of the opposition. Recommendations take more the form of a mindset than specific programs or techniques to counter the efforts of pressure groups.

First, and most important, organizations must come to regard responsibility to their external publics as effective as well as altruistic. Behaving responsibly works, as evidenced by the discriminant analysis conducted here. Related to responsible behavior, of course, is the organization's willingness to work hand in hand with the very activists who pressure it. Joint planning, either through committee work or a corporate board, leads to success for the organization.

Preparedness is another key determinant of organizational success. Organizations with standing committees dedicated to dealing with any activism fared better in actual disputes. Although disagreement may not be avoided entirely, the interest group's stance tends not to harden into hostility.

Initial cooperation with activists also might preclude their resorting to public displays of disaffection with the organization--actions that engender media coverage. Publicity alone may not be enough to influence public opinion in any significantly negative way, but it may have an interactive effect with the lobbying that environmentalists also practice so effectively in 1987. In other words, law-makers and regulators may be influenced by what they hear of an organization through the green lobby but also through their grassroots constituents. Together these forces of the public and protestors may lead to an unfavorable resolution for the organization.

Public awareness, though, may not be all bad. Community knowledge of an environmental dispute often causes organizations to respond more quickly and more openly than they would in obscurity. Thus they are almost forced to act responsibly. Only rarely, though, does the organization change its policies or even develop new programs in response to environmental activism. Apparently, then, communication is regarded as an end rather than a means to resolving issues cooperatively.

Instead, the astute agency or business should consider hiring the kind of individual best capable of working cooperatively with activists: one with enough education to understand the need for research and with the training and experience to conduct it. Research is important for several key reasons. Most respondents indicated that they knew little, if anything, about the activist group before the controversy erupted. When they did investigate, they relied on informal means such as the grapevine and media coverage. Any even quasi-scientific research tended to be evaluative, rather than formative. That is, the typical public relations practitioner measured his or her effectiveness after the fact, rather than conducting research to help in the planning process.

The effective public relations practitioner also would be willing to look at any environmental issue from at least two points of view and would appreciate the potential of communication for the necessary sharing of information and of attitudes.

This approach to public information seems especially important for small organizations and for government offices--those besieged by environmentalists who pressure them directly or indirectly or both. Activists may want to change government policy; but they also may want the appointed or elected policy-makers to change the practices of the business they oppose.

## Notes

[1] Earlier, Fraser (1978) had called grassroots environmentalism a "sleeping giant" because of its effectiveness in feeding information that resulted in favorable public opinion to the mass media.

[2] Both Stewart and Ryan and Martinson agreed, though, that this new role of mediator and issues manager

would require heightened credentials on the part of the public relations staff. If public relations practitioners remained qualified largely as technicians rather than as managers, they could expect MBAs or attorneys to respond to outside activists instead.

[3] Only about half of the 81 practitioners L. Grunig interviewed in the Washington, DC, area showed any degree of professionalism.

[4] Although 72 percent of executives recently surveyed disagreed with the notion that reporters are inherently antagonistic, 22 percent believed they had sensationalist tendencies (pr reporter, 1987). Other problems they cited in their dealings with the press include legal restraints that make it difficult for them to be forthcoming (63%), inaccuracy (59%), journalists' ignorance (39%), overemphasis on the negative (25%) and bias (12%). Respondents also acknowledged their own inadequacies in media relations: lack of openness, lack of facility in communication and ignorance of the way the press works.

[5] Inglehart (1984) contended that negative public opinion, based on media coverage, is preventing the utilization of nuclear power in this country. He also argued that although the issue has received massive coverage in the popular press, that media coverage has failed to convey to the public certain basic facts vital to making informed judgments. He blamed reporters' ignorance of those facts and their tendency to sensationalize.

[6] This works for activists as well as their targets. Goldenberg (1975) found that the greater the resources, the greater the interest group's access to the media. Press coverage, in her view, is especially vital when the group's goals are to establish its identity; project a certain image; convey information; identify its enemies publicly; build credibility; and gain resources through visibility, outside funding, moral superiority and personal reputation.

[7] Drucker (1984) contended that the government has not been consistently successful in solving social problems because there are too many social programs to be managed, political pressures tend to dictate short-term solutions, the government does not have the luxury of experimenting and the number of

constituencies with competing goals and values constantly increases.

[8] The author thanks the Department of Communications at Washington State University for use of its in-state telephone line to conduct most interviews.

[9] Examples include the American Board of Medical Toxicology, the Small Towns Institute, the Halibut Association of North America, the International Pesticide Applicators Association and the Northwest Marine Trade Association.

[10] Ideally, a sample of not-for-profit organizations would have been included. No such list was available within the state. However, many of the associations--such as the Association for the Severely Handicapped--are of non-profit organizations.

[11] Six open-ended questions were of the "other" variety, following a list of predicted responses that includes tactics of the activist group, sources of its funding, sources of information about the group, contacts with journalists, types of research conducted and professional associations to which respondents might belong.

Remaining open-ended questions dealt with the number of activist groups involved, a description of their activities, person in the organization responsible for dealing with activism, programs developed to deal with activism, ways of involving activists in those programs, ways in which public awareness affected organizational response, explanations for success or failure, hierarchy within the public relations department, size of the organization, size of the PR department's budget and amount budgeted for outside expertise, main product line or service and respondent's job title.

[12] The author acknowledges the interviewing help of students in an advanced seminar in public relations held at Washington State University: Mary Ainslie, Pamela Barron, Kymberley Brown, Carmen Comstock, Dale Deviveiros, Gwen Edwards, Debra Fankhauser, Matt Fischer, Carol Furrer, Thea Gormanos, Joe Hedges, Lori Hunter, Diane Newgard, Marianne Powers, Linda Schink, Diana Shruefer, Jill Schwenger, Bob Thompson and Dawn Wing.

[13] Holsti's (1969) formula was used to calculate intercoder reliability. His method determines the

reliability of nominal data in terms of percentage of agreement as follows:

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{2M}{N1 + N2}$$

where M is the number of coding decisions on which two coders agree, and N1 and N2 refer to the total number of coding decisions by the first and second coder.

This method has the advantages of being straightforward and easy to calculate. It has been criticized (Wimmer & Dominick, 1983, p. 154) because it fails to take into account the fact that some coder agreement occurs by chance (a function of the number of categories in the analysis).

[14] According to Wimmer and Dominick (1983), this is at the least an acceptable level of reliability using Holsti's formula--considering, in particular, the judgmental leeway given to coders (rather than the more mechanical process often inherent in, say, a content analysis that merely tabulates the number of times a word appears). In general, the more interpretation required, the lower the reliability will be.

[15] Several interviewees explained that this depends on the state of the economy.

[16] This study initially set out to determine the extent of activism per se. However, early interviews indicated that environmental concerns overwhelmed any other kind of activism at that time. So, cases described in this study are restricted to those that relate to environmentalism: predominantly in the areas of nuclear power, land development and air and noise pollution. The few issues mentioned outside of environmentalism, such as animal rights and pornography, where among the 35 uncompleted interviews.

[17] This finding should be interpreted in light of the understanding that three situations described remained unresolved at the time of the study.

[18] Coalitions ranged from two to more than 100 groups. Modal response was two groups (one-third of all cases).

[19] One respondent contended that the government is almost always a target, in addition to the offending corporation.

[20] One "yes" response was qualified with the caveat that the group was hostile "in words only." Another respondent argued that the group would have been hostile, but its leaders knew it "wouldn't get anywhere" with hostility.

[21] One respondent complained that the environmentalists had been treated more than fairly: "preferred," in his terms. He went on to explain that the telephone company, then, had to "fight an uphill battle" to counteract that pro-environmental coverage.

[22] One interviewee considered "bad coverage better than nothing."

[23] One response difficult to code into any category came from the state vocational rehabilitation office: "Our policy is to try to put the monkey back on their back by asking how they would deal with the issue if they were in our position."

[24] As one respondent explained, "At lease we showed a willingness to sit down and talk. Perhaps this will help us work through our differences eventually."

[25] One interviewee commented, "Hopefully we'll never need one." Public relations, in her view, was necessary only in response to crises.

[26] Although activities considered typical of public relations could number in the hundreds, J. Grunig (1976) devised a more manageable list of 16 that has since been used in countless studies of the field.

[27] In factor analysis, one must be careful not to attempt to determine any underlying causal structure. By choosing names for each factor, though, one does try to divine its meanings based on the activities that load highly on it.

[28] Frequency, of course, is relative. As one respondent said, "often" in his department now is 45 releases a year compared with 300 as recently as two to three years ago.

[29] One respondent reminded the interviewer that this is illegal for governmental agencies.

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